From the library of
John Alexander Mackay
(1889–1983)

MANU • FORTI
Mackay

Third President and Professor of Ecumenics
Princeton Theological Seminary
1936–1959

CoLibri
COVER SYSTEM ®
Made in Italy

JAMackay

13. 5. 35

THE
MIGHTY THREE

THE
MIGHTY THREE

Poushkin ~ Gogol ~ Dostoievsky

A Critical Trilogy

By

BORIS BRASOL

Author of
*Critical Essays, Socialism vs. Civilization,
The Balance Sheet of Sovietism, The World
at the Cross Roads, The Elements of Crime,* etc.

Introduction
By PROFESSOR CLARENCE A. MANNING

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON

OCT 11 2018

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

New York
WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON
1934

COPYRIGHT, 1934
BY WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON
NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AT THE STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I FEEL greatly indebted to Dr. Clarence A. Manning for his introduction to this volume; his generous remarks coming, as they do, from a scholar of Slavic literature, to me, are highly gratifying.

To the late Lindsay S. Perkins, at one time Senior Translator of the State Department, I am grateful for the permission he gave me shortly before his death to reproduce here his able English versions of Poushkin's *Stanzas* and the *Birdie Song* from the *Gypsies*.

It also gives me real pleasure to express warm appreciation to my wife, Eleanor Brasol, and Miss Beatrice Gibson, for their helpful criticisms and many excellent suggestions on the arrangement and interpretation of the literary material.

THE AUTHOR

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

https://archive.org/details/mightythreepoush00bras

INTRODUCTION

THE great authors of Russian literature in the Nineteenth Century were never the idle singers of an empty day. To a degree which is true of no other modern literature, the mighty writers of Russia were not only poets and novelists, but also prophets, guides, critics, and teachers of their country. The educated classes read their works not merely to obtain pleasure but likewise to learn of their own virtues and vices, their own possibilities and weaknesses, their own successes and failures. In a word, the writers of the past century held up to their people a picture of themselves and their country in all of the deeper aspects of life, and the people accepted that picture and studied it seriously.

Such an attitude towards literature brought about a corresponding development in the field of literary criticism: Purely literary and aesthetic studies were not popular. On the other hand, the function of the critic was to bring out for the reading public those aspects of the author's talent which would be of real significance to Russia and humanity, and to press home the lesson of the poet and novelist.

In the present volume of essays on three of the greatest Russian authors—Poushkin, Gogol and Dostoievsky—Mr. Brasol is working in the spirit of Russian literary criticism. He has sought to find the psychological and philosophical relations between the three authors and to illustrate the unparalleled position of Poushkin in the history of Russian literature. Abroad this greatness is hardly recognized but it is becoming ever more evident that Gogol and Dostoievsky, as well as all the other great writers of the past century, were influenced by Poushkin in many unsuspected ways, and that his importance can hardly be overemphasized.

The analysis of these three authors in this volume illustrates again the wide range of Russian thought and interest, and that broad all-human character which is the salient trait of Russian literature and has won for it its world-wide fame. More and more, the technical methods of Gogol and Dostoievsky are influencing the world. We are learning from them the psychological analysis of character, while their works are coming to be part of that small number of masterpieces which must be familiar to every educated man, in whatever country he lives. From them we are learning to measure the heights and depths of human nature. The world now needs to add to these men Poushkin, absorbing that sense of balance and proportion which is his great characteristic.

Mr. Brasol has done his work well. He has included in this volume many excellent translations of his own, and most of them appear in English for the first time. He has done more than that. He has written a book that is preëminently readable as a piece of English, and in a delightful form he has given an important study of the Russian masters which is of real value and cannot be overlooked by the serious student of literature.

Clarence A. Manning
Assistant Professor of Slavonic Languages
Columbia University.

PREFACE

THOUGH scarcely more than one century old, the imaginative literature of Russia has astounded and thrilled civilized mankind just as much as the enchanting harmonies of her music: The names of Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev, Chekhov, Dostoievsky have found their way into the mind and heart of modern man, while their broad visions and noble aspirations have immensely enriched the treasury of human culture. We meditate over their thoughts; we are afflicted with their sorrows; we share in their doubts; we feel perturbed by their struggles, and we have all lived through their sufferings:—They are part of us; we are part of them, and their lives seem to be strangely linked with our own.

On the literary Olympus, Russian men of letters have won and held a lasting place which neither vogue nor time can take away from them: Their fame, like that of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, is theirs forever. The reverberations of their profound ideas can be also traced in the literature of the Occidental World—in the philosophical pathos of Nietzsche; in the naturalistic speculations of Zola; in the mystical dramas of

Maeterlinck; in the sad dreams of Knut Hamsun, in the disturbing novelettes of Maupassant, and in the refined works of Polish impressionists like Wispianski, Przebyszevski and Tetmajer.

But he who is the prime cause, pure source and lucid inspiration of everything that is undying in Russian poetry and art; he who has given birth to a brilliant literary epoch as refreshing and prolific as the Italian Renaissance; he whose unfading glory is the greatest pride of every Russian,—he, the honored and revered,—he remains unknown, or nearly so, outside the boundaries of that which, in the past, was known as . . . Russia.

This is Poushkin.

His rhymes and dreams and hopes, his all-embracing genius, at most, enjoy dispassionate academic recognition, evoking in the European reader neither happy smiles nor mournful tears.

Yet, Poushkin is something infinitely more momentous than a mere poet, enviable though a poet's laurels be. In Poushkin, we find condensed every element of thought, every nucleus of feeling which, later, were so exuberantly exploited by Russia's most gifted artists. Poushkin is the living kernel of everything that lives and always will be admired in the domain of creative inspiration. The sun of his poesy sheds a soft and even light upon the vast fields of Russian literary achievement. And to the Russians, Poushkin is so real, so dear, so pathetically needed, that their being, indeed, cannot be divorced from his—this because, as one of the Russian critics said, he is "our glorious and ever-cherished companion, an eternal contemporary who marches with us from our early childhood to the grave; Poushkin is always close to us, always ready to respond to the calls of our hearts longing for beautiful revelations."

The words which he spoke about Joukovsky, another famous poet, could equally serve as an envoi to Poushkin's own creations:

"His verses' captivating fascination
Through centuries will stand the jealous test:
Youth, hearing them, will sigh for fame's sensation,
And silent Grief in them will find its rest,
And mirthful Joy will pause in meditation."

The three essays brought together under this cover, though treated as separate themes, were conceived by me as a critical ensemble.

In this approach to Russia's "Mighty Three", I was guided, not by mere "poetic license", to which—and this in passing—the critic is entitled just as much as the poet himself, but by the strong conviction that there is an intimate ideational affinity of both Gogol and Dostoievsky with Poushkin; this fact, today, can hardly be questioned, and the combined legacy of these master builders of Russian literary tradition is fully expressive of its main currents and generic leanings.

For in the divine symphony of Poushkin's rhymes, and in the sparkling recitatives of Gogol's laughter, and in the largo of Dostoievsky's prophetic breath, one discerns *all* seeds out of which Russian imaginative literature has gradually grown into a grand tree of man's knowledge of himself.

Gogol and Dostoievsky, much as they are antipodes, have both been born out of Poushkin who is their common root, and neither could have existed without him. In their superb writings, as through a many-faceted prism, Poushkin's images were refracted, at times, assuming wholly unexpected and strange interpretation.

The undisturbed harmony of Poushkin has disappeared in both Gogol and Dostoievsky. Theirs are realms of irreconcilable conflicts, painful discords and tragic contrasts. Both have borrowed much from Poushkin, but the mystery of his "pagan" sense of measure has never been solved by either. Both Gogol and Dostoievsky have explored but one side or phase of Poushkin's philosophy, and in their searching quests they have reached such depths as perhaps may have never been surmised by Poushkin himself. But notwithstanding the colorful and sparkling humor with which Gogol was lavishly endowed, and despite the amazing intuition of Dostoievsky's clairvoyant power, neither Gogol nor Dostoievsky was ever able to lift himself to those snowy heights of Poushkin's wisdom where there is no fear of Life, no dread of Death—only a calm contemplation of both.

To the student, in an equal measure as to the general reader, a trilogy such as this may offer a distinct advantage in that it enables him to comprehend more readily, and appreciate more clearly, the comparative import, the aesthetical weight, and the historical meaning of the work which each of the three artists has left in his wake: the interplay of their wits and meditations is thus borne out more graphically, while fragmentary comment acquires the significance of an integral whole.

Biographical data will be found scattered, here and there, in all three sketches; yet, the analytical emphasis is not on the life histories of the authors discussed in the book, but rather on their moral, psychological and philosophical credos, since it matters less *how* an artist happened to have lived, than *what* he actually accomplished.

Nor is it, to my understanding, the function of a critic to indulge in studious delineation of things and records which justly belong to other departments of learning: genealogy, history or heraldry, perhaps. But it is undeniably the prerogative of art criticism in general to dwell upon the spirit, style, intrinsic substance and objective realness of the creative exploit—on the fanciful arabesques and fleeting silhouettes, now curiously intriguing, now irresistibly delightful, of a poet's imagination, on the revelations of his soul, on the intricate aspects of his personality,—for all these are but vital ingredients in the virtuosic cast itself.

On these shores, essays on Russian literature seem to be all the more appropriate as, up to the present, the vast country extending from the Vistula to the Pacific, from the White Sea to the Black, from the city of St. Peter to the remote frontiers of India, is still a *terra incognita,* a huge and silent Sphinx, not only unknown, but almost unknowable.

Even the belles lettres of that mysterious land remain quite alien to the American public at large, and this is particularly true of Russian poetry. Here, both Americans and Europeans find themselves confronted with next to insurmountable difficulties of rendering the Russian verse into any foreign tongue.

It is to this condition that Western ignorance of Poushkin is largely due. The fabulous wealth of his artistic heritage naturally cannot be appreciated by those who are denied the earnest joy of knowing the Russian language with all its splendor, truth, variety and fragrance.

The English is perhaps least adapted to rhythmic translations of any kind, primarily owing to the scarcity of its poetic modes. No doubt, this explains why, among British poets—the most talented not excluded—phonetically imperfect rhyming, such as: *love-prove; come-tomb; spirit-inherit,* is rather common. However, the canon of Russian prosody permits no such deviations from the rigid rule of assonance or accord, while the slightest flaw in the build and melody of the English version of Russian strophes robs the original of its inherent beauty and the self-contained value of its craftsmanship.

The poetical translations interwoven with the text of the essays printed here, for the most part, were made by myself and have never been published before.* In my renditions I have endeavored to follow as faithfully as possible the metric properties, the subtle choice of epithet and the architectonic order of the Russian, revealing in this way the emotional atmosphere and style, the swing and music, or that which is known as the "sensuous life" of the verse. Of course, whenever in the parent tongue a poem has been composed in blank, the English, too, is free—to use Milton's words—of "the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming."

It was my aim to present in these light sketches a psycho-critical evaluation of the monumental and exquisite work of the three ingenious Russians. In my treatment, I carefully avoided overtaxing the essays with bibliographic, exegetic and otherwise technical material. On the other hand, it did not seem to me wise to discuss Poushkin, Gogol and Dostoievsky without parallel allusions to other

---

* As to the prose citations, the bulk of these were also rendered into English by myself, and even where Constance Garnett's, Eva Martin's and Julius Bramont's able translations were cited, I ventured to retouch these in order to bring the English text nearer to the Russian.

European masters—poets, moralists and thinkers—each one of whom contributed his share to the crystallization of Russian literary taste and artistic perfection. And I only hope that the English speaking reader will emerge from the perusal of my trilogy with a sympathetic understanding of Russia's "Mighty Three" whom I took the liberty of portraying here.

BORIS BRASOL

CONTENTS

PREFACE xi

POUSHKIN 1

GOGOL 117

DOSTOIEVSKY 191

POUSHKIN

POUSHKIN

May 26, 1799–January 29, 1837

Alexander S. Poushkin was born in Moscow on May 26, 1799. In October, 1811, he entered the Imperial Lyceum at Czárskoye Seló, then the summer residence of Emperor Alexander I. Poushkin's first poems, light and imitative, date back to the early part of 1812. In 1817, he graduated at the Lyceum and proceeded to St. Petersburg where he joined the literary association, "Arzamas", of which Karamzín and Joukovsky, the former—a noted historian, the latter—a gifted romantic poet, were the leading members. During this early period, Poushkin wrote a long series of lyrical pieces, love stanzas, elegies and idylls which, though fully expressive of his youthful sentiments, evinced in him remarkable poetic power. In 1820, he wrote his first long poem—*Ruslán and Ludmíla.* Early in that year, in consequence of his spicy epigrams, having invoked upon himself the displeasure of the Government, Poushkin was ordered to leave St. Petersburg for Ekaterinoslav on a government mission. There, Poushkin fell ill, and he received permission to proceed for a cure to the Caucasus. It was there that he started studying Byron. Having spent several months in the Caucasus, he proceeded to the Crimea, and thence to Kishinev in Bessarabia. Impressed by the Southern scenery, and under the influence of Byron, Poushkin wrote three poems: *The Caucasian*

Captive (1821), *The Bakhchissaraí Fountain* (1823) and *The Gypsies* (1824). In 1824, Poushkin left Kishinev for Odessa, where, again, he got himself in trouble: accused of bad behavior and of having uttered atheistic opinions, he was ordered to leave for Mikháilovskoie, his own estate in the Province of Pskov. Poushkin remained in this exile approximately two years; he lived there all alone with no one but Arína Rodiónovna, his old peasant nurse, to brighten his seclusion. The enforced sojourn in Mikháilovskoie proved beneficial to the poet's mental growth. It was there that he conceived and completed his famous tragedy *Borís Godounóv,* which was written under the marked influence of Shakespeare. During the same period he wrote the major part of *Eugene Onegin,* his *opus magnum*. In September, 1826, Poushkin received permission to leave Mikháilovskoie, and he proceeded to Moscow, where he was given an audience by Emperor Nicholas I. The two subsequent years Poushkin spent partly in Moscow and partly in St. Petersburg. In 1828, he completed *Poltava,* a long poem dedicated to the memory of Peter the Great and the well-known battle of Poltava (1709), where the Russians defeated the invading army of Charles XII, King of Sweden. In 1829, Poushkin proposed to Natalie Goncharóva, and on February 18, 1831, he married her in Moscow. In the Autumn of 1830, he spent several weeks in Bóldino, another estate of his in the Province of Nijni-Novgorod. There, he wrote four miniature tragedies: *The Miser Knight; The Feast During the Plague; Don Juan,* and *Mozart and Salieri*. Besides, he conceived and completed *The Little House in Kolómna,* a long poem in octaves. Beginning with the same year, Poushkin turned his attention to prose. In 1833, he completed his last big poetic work *The*

Bronze Horseman—perhaps the most remarkable of his major poems—again portraying Peter the Great. The best of his works in prose are *The Bielkin Tales* (1830), *Doubróvsky* (1833), *The Queen of Spades* (1833), *The History of the Pougachév Rebellion* (1833) and *The Captain's Daughter* (1836). Insulted by the attentions which Baron Haeckern-Dantes, a young Guard officer, was paying to Natalie Poushkin, the poet, on January 27, 1837, fought a duel with his rival, and was fatally wounded by him. Poushkin died in St. Petersburg on January 29, 1837.

I

Do learn from me, do emulate me, Russian actors,
For masterfully did I play my part.

Apoúkhtin

No literary event can be adequately comprehended apart from its historical background, without the grasp of those heterogeneous factors and conflicting relationships which mould the psychology of a people in whose midst the poet lives and from whom he borrows that incommunicable element which is often spoken of as "the national spirit." This is particularly true of Poushkin, Russia's most faithful son and most perfect product. For this reason, it does seem legitimate to preface the sketch on Poushkin by a few words concerning that period of Russian history which immediately preceded his famous epoch.

Poushkin was born on May 26, 1799, only three years after Empress Catherine the Great had died. The long years, during which she ruled over the Russian Empire, were full of glory, richly fraught with heroic deeds and political adventure. Russia was then striving for European supremacy, and it was the thunder of her victorious cannons which awoke Europe to the fact that henceforth the Orient would be bearing potent pressure upon the destinies of the Western World.

Characterizing Catherine's golden age, Bielinsky, the foremost Russian critic, wrote:

> "Her reign is an epic poem, gigantic and daring in its conception, dynamic and grandiose in its execution, brilliant and unique in its expression—an epic poem worthy of a Homer or a Tasso."

A woman of unusual talent, Catherine knew that Russia's future, her unity and greatness, were wholly dependent upon the realization of those majestic schemes which were originally conceived by Peter the Great. And so her own policies became a sequel of Peter's impatient, passionate and sweeping work, his proud revolt against an ossified and antiquated nation. For once in the history of mankind, it was not an enlightened people rising against their backward monarch, but an enlightened monarch challenging his backward people.

Yet, Peter's early death prevented him from scoring a final triumph over Russia which, with his iron bridle, he merely succeeded in throwing on her haunches. Catherine firmly resolved to complete that which Peter had begun. This is why, on the famous Falconette monument to the Northern Cæsar, erected in St. Petersburg on the Neva banks, she ordered these plain, though symbolic, words to be engraved: "To Peter the *First*—Catherine the *Second*."

In less than half a century, Catherine accomplished an immense task: She organized Russian finances; she introduced a firm administrative system; she established law and order among the rebellious Cossack communities; she surprised the Western rulers with the shrewd wisdom of her diplomacy; she conquered the Crimea; she laid the corner stone of public education; she assured Russia's domination on the Black Sea, and, in consequence of two victorious wars, she put forever an end to Turkey's aspirations on the Continent of Europe.

No feudal state, not even France, has ever attained in so short a time stability as lasting and prosperity as general as those which were conferred upon Russia during that reign of enlightened autocracy. Catherine possessed the rare gift of choosing for the work of national reconstruction ingenious and faithful collaborators who carried out her plans with remarkable efficiency and unshaken resolve. She was fortunate to have found among the Russians of those days her Richelieus and Mazarinis: as gentlemen they excused her feminine weaknesses; as statesmen, they admired her masculine virtues.

Despite all this, Catherine's epoch produced no real culture and left in its wake no enduring tradition. Literature, for one thing, remained unimaginative, dull, and marked with no originality of thought. The Empress was sure that no nation can ever claim greatness without creating a great Art of its own, and, in order to build up a literary vogue, Catherine herself started writing comedies, folk tales and novels, some of which are considered quite successful philological compositions. Much as she distrusted journalism, she did give her powerful support to journalists of the benign kind.

The theatre, with its dramatists and actors, was placed under Catherine's high patronage. Large sums were expended for the advancement of the national drama, and this was the beginning of the impressive triumphs which, in the Nineteenth Century, were scored by the Russian stage.

With a coquetry peculiar to her sex, the Empress cleverly made her aristocratic courtiers and middle class courters spread the secret of her liaisons, intellectual only though they were, with progressive thinkers and philosophical wags, such as Grimm, on the one hand, and Voltaire—on the other. And nothing does lend itself so readily to gossip as a secret, and nothing propagates as quickly as gossip,—loquacity and gossip being inseparable companions.

These tactics on the part of the First Lady of the Land finally did produce something in the order of a literary movement, the intrinsic value of which, however, was more than doubtful: While scores of literators began to spring up on Russian soil, yet, on the whole, they failed to give birth to a literature.

Wilde's witty remark that Whistler, with all his faults, was never guilty of writing a line of poetry, would have been in no sense applicable to the cohort of Russian poets—versifiers rather—who made their début during the reign of Catherine the Great. Protracted and high flown odes were liberally poured into the boiling literary pot; still, these were but pseudo-classical productions, devoid of either style or animation.

It was a peculiar state of affairs where Russian society, composed of stately grandees, knew next to nothing about the Russian language, using French instead; and where the mass of the people had no knowledge of the French, speaking an obsolete Church-Slavic argot that possessed great potentialities, but was then altogether undeveloped.

Even the best among the writers of those days—men like Fonvízin, with his biting satires, and Derjávin, with his scholastic odes—were merely following the beaten path, imitating Western standards and contributing little to the wealth of that language about which, only one century later, Turgenev spoke these significant, and perhaps prophetic, words:

> "In days of doubt, in days of painful hesitation about the destinies of my native land,—thou alone art my trust and my support,—thou great, mighty, faithful and free Russian tongue! Were it not for thee, how could one avoid falling into despair in the face of everything occurring at

> home! And yet, it is incredible that such a tongue should not have been bestowed upon a great people."

But in the Eighteenth Century, the Russian literary vocabulary was still scarcely more than a cacophonic concoction of Slavic dialects, mingled with French, Dutch and German idioms, which Peter the Great had adopted for purposes of expedience, forcibly thrusting them into the living body of the Russian popular speech.

Society under Catherine had hardly freed itself from half-oriental barbarism. European civilization, wrought upon Russia by the iron will of Peter, was still something quite alien to her, something she could not have absorbed so soon. The result was that, far from benefiting by Peter's radical reforms, and instead of evolving more perfect modes of living, or, at least, acquiring good manners,—the Russians contracted nothing but ugly mannerism, aping the West without really understanding it. In other words, neither Peter the Great nor Catherine II, despite their personal influence and superhuman efforts, succeeded in creating a Russian culture genuinely its own: The beginning was there; the first symptoms of a Renaissance were there,—and yet, another, perhaps more mighty, genius was required to put Russia on the map—not merely as a political power, for this she became under Catherine—but as a potent factor in the intellectual development of mankind.

This task was achieved by Poushkin.

Early in the Eighteenth Century, Peter gave the stern command that Russia educate herself. Early in the Nineteenth Century, Russia responded by the gigantic phenomenon of Poushkin.

II

> *How can one fail to love dear Moscow?! . . .*
>
> BARATINSKY

POUSHKIN was born in Moscow.

His father, Sergeí Lvóvich, an accomplished grand seigneur of olden times, descended from an eminent Russian aristocratic family. As though created for the frivolous and idle atmosphere of the metropolitan salons, his only ambition was to gleam in the *beau monde,* to which he naturally belonged by birth and education. He had no rivals in the somewhat useless occupation of declaiming French poetry. In this he was encouraged by the smart sets of both Russian capitals, where the cult of Paris was then regarded as an unfailing proof of good manners and distinguished taste. In Moscow his sportive calembours and witty impromptus enjoyed such a reputation that they were repeated and memorized by those who had little, if anything, else to learn or to remember.

There was much that was incongruous about these noblemen and dames who considered themselves, and actually were, the cream of fashionable society, and it was not without good reason that Griboiédoff so eloquently denounced them in his ingenious comedy, which ten successive Russian generations have learned by heart, and whose central thought was bluntly expressed in its mordant epigraph:

"Thus wicked Fate has ruled forever:
That fools for happiness be fit,
But those who happen to be clever
Shall always suffer *Woe from Wit.*" *

Nevertheless, the dawn of the Nineteenth Century, which Poushkin called "of Alexander's days the beautiful beginning," can justly be conceived as Russia's early Renaissance.

Tempi passati! . . .

Life in Moscow was then permeated with that grand air of loose, but sincere, hospitality which was so sympathetically and vividly depicted in Tolstoy's *War and Peace.* There was, indeed, a singular charm in the extravagant habits of those kind-hearted, unsuspicious and heedless men, who only a few years later, in the dark days of the Napoleonic invasion, outwitting strategy and tactics, unhesitatingly burned down Holy Moscow, which to them was not simply their beloved city, but rather a symbol of Russia's undying glory.

---

* This is the title of Griboiédoff's comedy.

Of that Moscow Sergeí Lvóvich Poushkin was a faithful son.

The Creole mother of the poet, Nadéjda Óssipovna, whose maiden name was Hannibál, was the granddaughter of Ibragím Hannibál, the famous Negro whom Peter the Great had adopted as his son. It might have been this strain of African blood flowing through the veins of Poushkin that kindled the fire of his passionate temperament which never was, nor ever could have been, appeased.

Poushkin himself did not try to conceal or deny the fact that one of his ancestors was a descendant of the black race. In his talks and correspondence he frequently brought up this delicate subject with naïve candor. Writing, for instance, to his wife about a bust which a Moscow sculptor intended to make of him, Poushkin said:

> "I am opposed to this! Here my Negro ugliness, in all its dead immobility, would be preserved forever."

Admission of his blood relationship with Ibragím Hannibál was also made by Poushkin in an epigrammatic poem *My Genealogy*. There, he defended his family status which had been challenged by one Boulgárin: The mediocre critic insinuated that the poet's grandfather was a Turkish slave, and that merely to please Peter—that Imperial shipbuilder, carpenter and skipper—he had been bought for a trifling sum by the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople. In part, Poushkin's rebuttal reads:

"Figliárin * claims—of course, he's dumb—
That Hannibál, my great grandfather,
Was bought for just a pint of rum
To please a skipper, who was rather
A skipper of unquestioned fame,
For he was one who set in motion
The rudder of that ship, whose name
We worship all with true devotion."

In another poetical fragment Poushkin somewhat humorously described himself as an "ugly offspring of the Negroes".

Speaking generally, however, the poet attached little significance to the admixture of African blood in his ascending line; he wisely accepted this genetic flaw, if it was a flaw at all, as a *fait accompli,* with no sense of false shame or hypocritical regret. Though altogether free from self-conceit, Poushkin knew that he owed no apologies to his native land, since his name would go down in history as that of Russia's most admired genius. This conviction was so deeply rooted in him that five months before his death, as if foreboding his tragic end, he wrote *The Monument,* a poem which begins with this proud and prophetic statement:

"A monument, not built with human hands,
I have erected to myself."

---

* Nickname for Boulgárin.

III

C'est l'âge de Chérubin
BEAUMARCHAIS

BUSILY engaged in giving and attending fashionable affairs and entertainments, the parents of young Poushkin had neither time nor desire to take much heed to his education. Besides, ever since the boy's cradle age, the mother showed a strange dislike for him, deliberately neglecting the child whose fate was placed in the hands of governesses and hired tutors. Only Arína Rodiónovna, the poet's peasant nurse, devoted much gentle care and purely maternal love to her indocile and unruly, but appreciative and good-natured pupil who, in *Eugene Onegin,* perpetuated her memory in the character of Tatiana's nurse. The same feeling of affection for his dear old Arína prompted Poushkin to compose the little poem *To My Nurse,* with its touching opening lines:

"My friend in days of desolation,
Oh, my decrepit, darling dove!
Amidst the woods, in isolation,
Alone, thou waits for me with love."

As a lad, Poushkin had no taste for diligent study nor, in fact, for any study at all. One of his tutors remarked about him:

> "He is quick of apprehension, ingenious, witty,—
> and indolent in the extreme."

However, the boy, even before he had entered school, used to spend long hours in his father's French library, devouring volume after volume, with neither aim nor system. As a result of this promiscuous reading, he grew fond of French literature whose light and graceful airs found so delightful an interpretation in the evasive silhouettes of Watteau, Lancret and Fragonard—those immortal frolickers of the palette and the brush.

Still, the prevailing influence in Poushkin's tender years was that of Arína Rodiónovna; it was through her that he learned to appreciate the peculiar charm of the Russian fairy world: In the evening twilight, sitting in her lap, he listened eagerly to her tales about enchanted realms, and the strange pictures drawn by Arína Rodiónovna left in the boy's memory unforgettable impressions. Later, in his mature days, imagination often took him back to the mysterious woods and vales of a Wonderland, about which he had dreamed in early childhood, and then his genius would lend to these simple melodies of Russian legend a touch of unexpected beauty. Out of this precious material he fashioned the masterful Prologue to *Ruslán and Ludmíla* and his best folk tales—*The Fisherman and the Fish, Czar Saltán,* and *The Golden Cock* (*Coq d'Or*).

At the age of twelve, Poushkin entered the Imperial Lyceum at Czárskoye Seló, then the summer residence of Emperor Alexander I.

The Lyceum was a model school founded on the initiative of the Czar himself. Best teachers were summoned there to educate the children of Russia's finest aristocratic families.

In those days there was a peculiar and highly romantic atmosphere about Czárskoye Seló: The splendor of the Imperial Palace, which dated back to the epoch of Empress Elizabeth of Russia, blended in harmony with the virgin forests surrounding the town. Scattered in the green of the dreamy parks were hidden marble statues of ancient times: Here, an Artemis, or a bearded Pan, playing his magic flute; yonder a Venus showing the immortal forms of her nude; still further, an Apollo with his sonorous lyre. . . . Slow swans gliding over the calm surfaces of the silver lakes reflecting, as in a mirror, the azure of the Northern skies. . . . The humble tunes of the shepherd's pipe so strangely contrasting with the majestic grandeur of a triumphant Empire. . . .

Such was Czárskoye Seló, where Poushkin, in his "student's cell", began to receive the mysterious calls of the playful Muse, whom he had christened "my mirthful little Bacchae", and whom—he tells us—his youthful mates "were boisterously courting."

These, indeed, were the happiest years in Poushkin's short life. In the Lyceum he got acquainted with a whole group of youths who happened to have taken a live interest in literature and a real liking for art. With some of these boys Poushkin contracted lasting friendships.

Among this young and vivacious crowd, there was, of course, a good deal of mischief and general deviltry. The tutors made no attempt to overwhelm their pupils with scientific studies or to convert them to stoicism, and later Poushkin confessed that they all, indulging in the luxury of half-knowledge,

> "Have learned somehow a bit of something."

Stirred by Poushkin, inspired by his example, the Lyceum pupils were giving much time to literary occupations. They even managed to maintain, for their own consumption, a magazine entitled *The Inexperienced Pen,* in which Poushkin's poetical compositions first appeared in print. There was hardly anything serious about these half-infantile imitative efforts, except that they tended to develop taste and style among those who were destined to become the master minds and master builders of Russian classicism.

IV

They flow—these streams of love—they flow so full of thee. . . .
POUSHKIN

He lives in haste
And savours in a hurry.
PRINCE VIAZEMSKY

WHEN, in 1817, Poushkin graduated at the Lyceum, he was at once heartily greeted by that distinguished writers' circle, of which Karamzín, the noted historian, and Joukovsky, the bard of Russian romanticism, were the moving spirits. These men founded a literary association "Arzamas" of which Poushkin became the unchallenged leader.

In St. Petersburg, which is only a few miles from Czárskoye Seló, Poushkin was caught in the whirl of an empty and distracted life, full of romance, glittering entertainments and amorous adventure. For a while, the theme of the "eternal feminine" completely captured his imagination, and he became an ardent student of that delightful discipline which he himself so aptly called "the science of tender passion." Those were the days when he seemed ready to sacrifice everything on the altar of Love, possibly on the theory that

"All ages bow to Love's sweet flowers,
But young hearts profit by its fits,
Like fields—by Spring's tempestuous showers." *

---

* From *Eugene Onegin.*

Intoxicated by the nectar of golden adolescence, Poushkin was overwhelmed by entrancing visions and ecstatic fancy. He dreamed, as Shelley would have said,

"Of some world far from ours,
Where music, and moonlight, and feeling—
Are one."

These moods were faithfully recorded in his creations embracing the entire *Sturm und Drang* period of his life. Lyrical impromptus, sonorous elegies, pastoral idylls and love stanzas flowed from the poet's pen in endless variations. And each one of these poetic wee gems was full of shine and luster and emotion, as though designed to be translated into strains of lovely music like that which Rubinstein must have overheard in the cadenced sounds of Poushkin's famous *Night:*

"My voice, which breathes for thee with languor and delight,
Disturbs the tranquil silence of the slumb'ring night.
A lonely candle sadly glimmers by my side;
My verses flow and fade, like murmurs of a tide;
They flow—these streams of love—they flow so full of thee;
And in the dark thine eyes are strangely luring me;
They smile at me, and I can hear thy voice divine:

'My friend . . . My gentle friend . . . I love . . .
I'm thine . . . I'm thine!' " *

One romance followed another in almost uninterrupted succession. And when the little winged God would pierce with his arrow the poet's heart —that heart would be all flame and passion.

These recurrent states of fervid exhilaration continued to visit Poushkin long after he had outlived the Spring of his youth. As late as in 1825, during one of such spells—Poushkin was then in love with Madame Kern—he kept sending to his new inamorata letter after letter, full of fiery avowals and invincibly bewitching nonsense. What confessions of an untamable and effervescent heart! Is not this, for instance, a classical postscriptum?—

> "P.S. Again I am grabbing the pen just to tell you that I am at your feet; that I still love you; that, at times, I hate you; that the other day I was telling dreadful things about you; that I kiss your darling little hands; that I kiss them again and again, in anticipation of something even better; that I can wait no longer; that you are divine, etc."

And so the elusive and ever-changing image of *a* woman who, if Verlaine be right, "is never quite the same", was constantly agitating and teasing

---

* This author's version appeared in print for the first time in *The International Unbound Anthology,* published by the Poet's Guild, New York, 1930.

Poushkin's mind. For her, the "unknown, yet passionately longed for and beloved", Poushkin sings:

"Of late I had a dream—I had the sweet sensation,
As if a golden crown had been bestowed on me,
And I was King. I dreamed of thee:
My heart was thrilled with fascination.
In words, so full of love, my passion I revealed . . .
Oh, dreams, why did you not my happiness extend?—
And yet, the gods were not so cruel in the end:
Naught but a Kingdom did I yield."

What Poushkin said about Rossini, Europe's Orpheus of those days, was certainly true of the poet himself:

"Ignoring critics, dumb and sage,
Defying time, resisting age,—
He sheds his sounds—they are all flame,
They flow, devoid of plan or aim,
Like kisses young in passion's play;
They leap and bound—they are divine,
Like sparkles of that fizzing wine,
Like splashes of its golden spray."

Such, indeed, was Poushkin at the dawn of his life, with all the alluring charm of his naughtiness, and all the irresistible attraction of his wit: Poushkin, the *enfant terrible,* and the *enfant gâté* of Russian aristocracy.

Friends and well-wishers of Poushkin grew worried about his frivolous proclivities: they feared that the rising sun of Russia's literary fame would be wantonly wasting his inspiration on things, indeed, quite unimportant. Bátushkov, a romantic author and a contemporary of Poushkin's, jokingly suggested a rigorous régime for the young poet's moral reformation:

> "What is the Cricket * doing?"—he exclaimed—"Did he ever complete his poem?—It wouldn't be a bad idea to lock him up for three years at Goettingen, keeping him on a milk, soup and logic diet. No matter how radiant Cricket's talent is, he will waste it if . . . but may the Muses and our prayers save him!"

The same untroubled serenity pervaded Poushkin's whole life. In her *Memoirs* for the year 1831, Olga Smirnóva, the Madame Récamier of Russian literary salons, recorded:

> "That evening, in the interval between two talks on religion and philosophy, the Cricket laughed so heartily that Maria Savélievna,† who was serving tea, declared that when she would be at Death's door, she would send for him to cheer her up."

In another place, Smirnóva recounts:

> "Poushkin read to us his verses which I shall submit to the Emperor when they will have been

---

* Poushkin's nickname.

† Smirnóva's housekeeper.

copied, but in the meantime, he started sketching little devils and caricature portraits all over his manuscript."

Only two days before his tragic duel, when Poushkin already knew that the catastrophe was imminent, he called on Brullov, a gifted Russian painter, in whose studio there was a display of water color drawings. Among these he noticed a humorous picture "Assembly at the Ball of the Austrian Ambassador at Smyrna", and there was no end to the poet's delight. A pupil of Brullov, who happened to be present at this scene, relates that Poushkin laughed till he cried, and suddenly he threw himself on his knees, with a most solemn air imploring the painter to make him a present of the painting.

Even in our day, when we think of Poushkin, our imagination begins to picture the happy singing "Cricket", in his habitual guise of an incurable merrymaker, a fit partner in every mischievous plot—the young waggish scapegrace, with his unfading youthful smile, always ready to applaud fun, always prepared to turn a serious thought into a joke, always eager to attack the trivial with a spicy epigram—the lucid image of Poushkin *"à l'âge de Chérubin"*, which he himself ingeniously sketched in the concluding chapter of *Eugene Onegin*.

It was still this Poushkin, the joyous sweetheart of the little Bacchae, who, like a fledgling trying out his wings, made up his mind to create something more weighty than the mere songs pitched in the Arcadian key which he had been twittering during the golden hours of his Spring. The "Cricket" decided to write *Ruslán and Ludmíla,* as his first bid for immortality.

V

I awoke one morning, and found myself famous.
BYRON

POUSHKIN was only twenty when he completed *Ruslán and Ludmíla,* a light and fanciful poem which, though fully expressive of his boyish sentiments, made his name famous overnight.

For the first time in Russian literary annals, the epic element and mythical themes were made the basis of, and freely interwoven with, a poetic composition of this kind. By one stroke of his pen, Poushkin swept into discard a long standing tradition of verbose and pretentious pseudo-classicism. With remarkable ease, he threw open the treasury of Slavic Epos, and suddenly, its colorful characters and symbols, like gushing Spring cascades, poured into the well of Russian aesthetic meditations.

Ruslán and Ludmíla was so astoundingly new in form and so profoundly popular in substance that it instantly focussed general attention on its young author, who, hitherto, had been admired chiefly as a brilliant minstrel of love, anacreontic in his leanings and epicurean in his tastes.

The Prologue, which Poushkin added to the poem several years after its completion, strikes just the right keynote of *Ruslán and Ludmíla,* with these two lines resounding as its overture and finale chords:

> "Affairs of long departed days,
> Of olden times undying legends."

The mysteries of the Russian fairy world unroll in this prelude—which is only an airy sketch, as it were, a casual touch of the artist's brush—vividly suggesting the theme and variations of the story which Poushkin tells in perfect rhymes. This is the synthetic picture drawn by the poet in his Prologue:

> "A seashore oak 'neath magic skies
> Swings from its boughs a golden chain,
> And day and night, Sir Cat the Wise
> Walks back and forth this fairy lane.
> He purrs a song, when to his right
> He turns; when to his left—a tale;
> 'Tis Wonderland! There dwells a Sprite;
> Old Nick roams there; this is his trail;
> There, wonder beasts on wood paths hide
> And track the forests o'er and o'er;
> A hut stands there, hens' legs astride,

Without a window or a door;
There, vales are full of ghosts forlorn;
There, waves embrace the shore at morn,—
The sandy shore, all desolate,—
And thirty knights, all bold and fair,
Rise from the waters, pair by pair,
And with them comes their old sea-mate;
A Royal Prince, with playful ease,
Enslaves a Czar of awing might;
There, 'midst the clouds, o'er woods and seas,
Old Wizard, in the people's sight,
With anger drags a valiant knight;
A Princess grieves in prison there,
The Brown Wolf serving her with care;
There, by itself, a Cauldron rambles
With Old-Witch roving through the brambles;
There,—gold is heaped; Kaschéy rots near it;
That's Russia, that is Russian spirit! . . .
And I roamed there, along those trails,
I saw the oak 'neath magic skies,
And there I sat, while Cat the Wise
Was purring me his wonder tales.

I still remember one he told:
List! while I let this tale unfold."

And the tale takes us back to the happy days of Prince Wladímir—"the Golden Sun"—the beloved hero in Russian legend and folk song. We see him, shining in his brocade attire, amidst a gorgeous feast which he is giving at his Kiev Palace in honor of Ludmíla, his youngest daughter, who has just become the bride of Ruslán—a valiant and undaunted knight.

Three rivals of the princely groom are attending the merry celebration—Rogdaí, a flaming, fearless warrior; Farláf, an uppish bawler,

> "At feasts, unconquered and unrivalled,
> But modest in the face of glaives",

and Ratmír, a youthful Khasar Khan,

> "All three, quite pale and rather gloomy—
> To them the feast is not a feast."

Says Poushkin:

> "Our ancestors ate long and slowly,
> And slowly did they move around."

Many a song has been sung, many a dish emptied, many a pitcher of mead consumed, before the noisy revel came to its drowsy end. Now, at last, Ruslán can escort Ludmíla to their bedroom. . . . And soon silence reigns throughout the Palace.

Suddenly, with lightning and thunder, a dark cloud descends upon the castle; all lights are blown out, and amidst horror and amazement, Ludmíla is swept away by some mysterious ghost.

Overwhelmed with grief, Prince Wladímir solemnly promises to give Ludmíla to him who finds her and safely brings her back. Ruslán and the three other claimants of the beautiful Princess, each take an oath that they will rescue and restore her to the stricken father.

Then comes the thrilling Odyssey of innumerable adventures which the four knights experience during their perilous wanderings through Kingdoms near and far in search of Ludmíla. Fate miraculously favors Ruslán, and finally, he does learn that Ludmíla was carried away and enslaved by cruel Chernomór, a long-bearded Wizard, dwelling in some remote dominion. Desperate are Ruslán's struggles, hazardous his encounters with daring enemies and unyielding Nature. But success crowns his venture, and he finds his beloved bride in Chernomór's enchanted castle; he captures the cruel Wizard and, filled with happiness and joy, he brings Ludmíla back to Kiev, while Chernomór, stripped of his magic beard, deprived of his dark power, and now but a humble dwarf, is presented by Ruslán to Wladímir, who makes him a trusted page at his brilliant Court. Reunited, Ruslán and Ludmíla celebrate the happy end of their calamities and troubles. Such is the mirthful conclusion of Poushkin's joyous story:

"Affairs of long departed days,
Of olden times undying legends. . . ."

Ruslán and Ludmíla was the first original creation of Russian romanticism. Hitherto, in strict adherence to Schiller's and Uhland's fashion, fantastic topics were usually associated with sagas of Western mediævalism, and to this extent, they were purely imitative. With his instinctive longing for the national ideal, Poushkin refused to borrow alien material for the expression of a romantic dream, and so he deliberately turned to Russian epics. There, he discovered a whole world of strange images and reanimating colors, and these he masterfully brought in harmony with the fancies of his own creative imagination. Of this accord a brilliant work of art was born.

Russian men of letters greeted *Ruslán* with almost unanimous applause. They all stressed the beauty of its style and the fresh richness of its poetic tongue.

Yet Poushkin himself, with his sense of superior refinement, was not in the least pleased with the poem, and in a letter to Prince Viazemsky, dating back to that period, he stated:

> "I finished my poem, but only the last, or final, verse gave me genuine satisfaction. . . . I am so bored with it that I simply cannot make up my mind to copy it, though by fragments, for you."

And in a subsequent note he made the defiant remark:

> "*Ruslán* is but a suckling."

Also, in the text of the poem itself, Poushkin bestows upon his creation various belittling epithets, such as "funny story", "light nonsense", "mirthful labor," and "sinful songs."

Indirectly, the same sentiment of discontent is intimated in the Epilogue to *Ruslán:*

"In vain I long for fascination:
They faded—my poetic dreams,
The days of love and golden beams,
The days of happy meditation.
Ye fleeted, moments of delight,
And thou hast vanished out of sight—
Oh, Muse of cadenced inspiration."

Surely Poushkin must have felt—and later this was correctly observed by several Russian critics—that, despite the popular style in which *Ruslán and Ludmíla* was written, he had not yet completely freed himself from Western standards: Here and there, particularly in the technique of Poushkin's verse, one does notice the influence upon him of poets like Voltaire and Ariosto.

But while *Ruslán* should not be conceived as an altogether independent product of Russian literary thought, it did prove the turning point in the history of Poushkin's own artistic growth. From that time on, foreign patterns were never taken by him as something granted; he pondered over them with veneration, as one should over any noble achievement of the human mind; he absorbed the ideas of the great European masters, but then his mighty genius would remint, remelt, reintegrate their dreams and visions into strikingly novel forms and astounding revelations.

VI

This morning I conversed with Russia's most remarkable man.

EMPEROR NICHOLAS I (after his interview with Poushkin)

La critique est aisée—l'art est difficile.

THE early creations of Poushkin, not excluding his *Ruslán,* as much as the whimsical arabesques interlaced with the bucolic motives of his lyre, were largely responsible for a legend which, temporarily at least, did cast a doubt on the scope and breadth of our poet's creative achievements. Shortly after his death, stories began to be told about the alleged "giddiness of the Poushkin talent"—a myth which, in days past, has been fancifully flourishing in the critical columns of many a leading magazine.

Only gradually, step by step, the Russians grew conscious of the fact that there is in Poushkin, in addition to frivolity and mirth, innate mischief and incurable optimism, graceful lightness and joyous animation—another aspect, an almost unsuspected phase of his mental make-up which, for a long time, has been sadly overlooked by both the poet's admirers and censors, but which, today, we unhesitatingly acknowledge as his *profound wisdom.*

Certainly, Gogol was right when, as far back as in 1832, he said:

> "Poushkin is an extraordinary, and perhaps unique, phenomenon of the Russian spirit: he represents the Russian in his development, such as he may become in some two hundred years. In Poushkin, the Russian nature, the Russian soul, the Russian tongue, the Russian character are reflected in such purity, in such refined beauty, as a landscape mirrored on the convex surface of an optical glass."

The serene philosophy of Poushkin; the Homeric calmness of his world outlook; his sane Hellenic approach to the earnest problems which persistently weigh upon man's conscience,—all this was particularly surprising at the threshold of the general decline of European culture—on the eve of Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism, Flaubert's aesthetic nihilism, Baudelaire's pathological sensualism, Nietzsche's rebellious anarchism, and Maeterlinck's mystical symbolism.

Poushkin was preëminently a poet of this World and not of the Next; he loved life, but he embraced it in its entirety,

"Without repentant aches, without distressing doubts,
Without faint-hearted tears at parting with the earth."

Perhaps, not in a strictly gnosiological, but certainly in an aesthetic and cultural sense, the wisdom of Poushkin, like priceless pearls, is scattered through his many poems and lyrical verses; tragedies and studies of the Russian folk lore; letters and prose fragments; critical essays and historical works, but particularly, in his virtuosic conversations, which Olga Smirnóva, as Eckermann in the case of Goethe, recorded with loving care.

In her illustrious salon, Poushkin reigned supreme. When he spoke, everybody kept silent. And there was no end to his brilliant discourses on history, religion, science, literature, politics, philosophy and art. Those who had been watching Poushkin's phenomenal mental growth, were unable to comprehend when and how he found time to absorb such an immense volume of diversified knowledge as he revealed in his undying talks.

This, for instance, is a typical passage from Poushkin's monologues:

> "Why did Plato seek to banish art from his Republic? This is illogical. . . . He says that Beauty is the luster of Truth; to this I add that Beauty should be the luster of Good. I will show you a fragment from one of the Neo-Platonics—I do not recall his name: Beauty, Truth and Symmetry are expressions of the Supreme Being. . . . Still, the Platonists failed to achieve the Beautiful, which is equivalent to Good translated into deed; they were merely dreaming of attaining that aim. Only Christianity succeeded in bringing about this accord. Perfect beauty is, to put it in one word, —*Harmony,* and what can be more lucid and more majestic than Harmony?—Joukovsky is right when he says that the Beauty of the Dreadful amounts to sacrilege."

On another occasion, speaking of English philosophy, Poushkin commented:

> "I was reading Locke, and I found that his is a religious mind, but one which confines knowledge to the feasible, though he himself had stated that in matters of faith the Bible, more than anything else, teaches us the truth, and that all problems of religious belief, while exceeding reason, do not contradict it. . . . Finally, I came to the conviction that man found God precisely because He exists. It is impossible, even in the world of plastical forms, to discover anything that does not exist—a thought which was conveyed to me by Art. . . . A form cannot be devised: it has to be derived from something that actually is. Nor is it possible to invent sentiments, thoughts and ideas not planted in us, those having a common root with the mysterious instinct which distinguishes a creature who at once feels and reasons, from that which merely feels. This reality is as real as everything that we can touch, experience or behold. The people possess an innate longing for this kind of reality—the religious sentiment—which they even refuse to analyze. Religion created art and literature, in fact, everything that was great in ancient times. Everything is dependent upon the religious feeling . . . and without it there would have been no philosophy, no poetry, no ethics."

With equal facility our poet would learnedly discuss Aristotle and the *Novum Organum,* Pascal's *Thoughts* and the theological principles of

Calvinism; Ptolemaic astronomy and English history; the Newtonian system and the songs of the minnesingers. To Poushkin, the world of knowledge was just as much an open book as Nature herself, with which, like Goethe, he breathed a life in common.

Yet, *"nul n'est prophète dans son pays"*. . . . The greatness of Poushkin, though recognized by his contemporaries, was vehemently challenged by the half-nihilistic or quasi-positivistic faction of Russian public opinion under Alexander II.

In the Sixties', Dmitry Pissarev, the eloquent but vainglorious apologist of materialism, started the anti-Poushkin crusade. His attack was followed by a series of others which were kept up over a period of several decades.

No doubt, there must have been something in the character of Poushkin, in his philosophy, in the complex gamut of his ideas and innate leanings that explains, though does not justify in the least, the conspicuous one-sidedness in the evaluation of his creative work by men of the Pissarev school.

To these Slavic apostles of Western radicalism, and through them—to the whole pleiad of the Russians who, during the Epoch of the Great Reforms, were chewing the cud of crude biological dogmatism, Poushkin was objectionable on the mere ground that his poetry was a glorious emblem of elegance and self-contained harmony. But the shaggy critics of those days ridiculed pure lyricism, and blamed Poushkin for having set an example to a whole progeny of poets, who were old-fashioned enough to admire Shakespeare in poetry, Chopin—in music, Raphael—in painting, and for whom Beauty, Love and Nature still retained both charm and value. Yet Pissarev neither could understand nor would forgive art devoid of some didactic, but preferably political, purpose, and he had no use for all the Petrarchs with their Lauras, the aesthetes, the Fets, indulging in the delicate weaving of verbless rhymes such as these:

"Murmurs. Breezes. Trills and singing
Of the nightingale.
Silver touches, gentle swinging
O'er the drowsy vale.

Lights and shadows. Strange sensations.
Visions full of grace,
And the magic of mutations
In that lovely face.

Clouds in purple. Amber blushes
'Cross the misty lawn!
Tears and kisses. Sudden flushes!
And the dawn! The dawn!"

Poushkin once said that he "preferred verses without a plan, rather than a plan without verses." However, the dull Catos of Russian literary manners, insisted that poetry should serve some utilitarian purpose, prosaic though it be. And how they hated the "murmurs" and "breezes"! For them Rouget de Lisle was the greatest among all poets, and

"Allons enfants, de la patrie!—
Le jour de gloire est arrivé"

the finest kind of poetry.

In their view inspiration of the Poushkin order was a glaring symptom of inexcusable lightmindedness. They who sought to establish equations between a keg of nails and the *Moonlight Sonata,* between a yard of cloth and a Keats' Sonnet,—they were utterly unwilling and unable to forgive Poushkin the ineffable aristocratism of his spirit, his sincere aversion to human vulgarism, which J. S. Mill caustically labelled "conglomerated mediocrity", and which to both Gogol and Dostoievsky became the everlasting denominator of Evil itself.

Poushkin's distaste for the democratic ideal and the dogmas of loose liberalism was the outgrowth of a whole life philosophy, the truth of which only now, in the Twentieth Century, begins to be surmised by sociologists and thinkers of the more constructive orientation.

A keen student of history, Poushkin knew that social progress is rarely, if ever, the result of mass action and mob rule, but rather the fruit of creative genius, the function of the individual's prudent intervention in the course of human affairs.

> "At all times,"—says Poushkin—"mankind was governed by the enlightened will . . . of the few. . . . Under all forms of government, men inevitably submitted themselves to the minority, or to the individual, so that, in a sense, the term 'democracy' appears to me meaningless and void of foundation. . . . Owing to the differences in talents and even physical constitution, there is no uniformity among human beings, and therefore, there is no equality. For the reformation of Russia the force of Peter alone proved sufficient. Napoleon, with no help from outside, muzzled the remnants of the Revolution. . . . The masses followed these men and supported them, but the first word was always spoken by them. All this stands in direct contradiction to the democratic system which tolerates not the leadership of individuals, and yet, they go to make up the natural aristocracy. . . . I doubt whether the world will ever see the end of that which springs out of the depths of the human mind, and which prevails in Nature herself,—I mean, *inequality.*"

These principles determined Poushkin's irreconcilable attitude towards the mob, kicking, with its democratic hoof, at the heraldic lion.

Speaking, in a letter to Prince Viazemsky, of Byron's "Memoirs", Poushkin expressed this interesting thought:

> "The rabble is avid to read confessions, reminiscences, etc., because, in their meanness, they re-

joice over the humiliations of the noble and the weaknesses of the mighty. Whenever they discover infamy of some kind, they feel delighted: 'Aha, he is as little as we, and he is just as abominable as we are!' But you are lying, shameful wretches: he is both little and abominable, but not like you—differently."

Time and again, Poushkin reiterated his repugnance for the vulgar, which does play such a manifest part in human affairs. In the *Monument,* which is Poushkin's own Requiem, he says:

"Nay, I shall not completely die; in sacred strains
My soul survives my dust; forever is its worth.
And famous shall I be, so long as there remains
A single Poet on this earth.

. . . .

By God's command, O Muse, abide obediently,
Nor shalt thou dread reproach, nor claim the Poet's bay:
To praise and blame alike thou shouldst indifferent be,
And let the fool have his own say."

The same note sounds in Poushkin's poem *The Rabble,* with its proud epigraph: *"Procul este, profani",* whose concluding four lines

"Not for earthly agitation,
Not for gain or battle grounds,—
We are born for inspiration,
Rev'rend prayers and sweet sounds",

in the past, caused a violent storm of indignation in radical quarters, and which even in our day seem to weigh upon the over-sensitive conscience of the professional propagators of the revolutionary gospel.

VII

Mortem effugere nemo potest
CICERO

Let Sun live forever!
Let gloom disappear!
POUSHKIN

MUCH has been said and written about Poushkin's so-called "Byronism". No doubt, the sense of aristocratic superiority, inherent in our poet, was akin to Byron's disdainful attitude towards everything that has no right or claim, whether imaginary or real, to immortality. Still, the inception of Poushkin's protestant moods is to be sought not so much in the contemptuous opinions of the disillusioned Lord as in the skeptical witticisms of the French *causeurs* and thinkers who, by their pens and tongues, paved the way for the drama of 1789. But even unassisted by Voltaire and Diderot, young Poushkin quickly grasped *le ridicule* in Russian every-day life; for this he had only to invoke his penetrating sense of humor which, later, he imparted to Gogol. But Gogol's sarcasm degenerated into that form of wit which, Hazlitt tells us, is so applied to given objects "as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless." This tendency in Gogol gradually assumed a pathological course, culminating in satirical hyperbolism. The innate feeling of measure and proportion guarded Poushkin against any such leanings.

Yet, when one is green, it does seem delightful to be challenging the whole universe and advocating immediate revaluation of all values. Before having read a single line from *Manfred* or from *Cain,* Poushkin wrote, in succession, a naughty ode to *Freedom,* and an inspired little poem *The Village,* in which he passionately and nobly denounced serfdom. But above all, he enjoyed making fun of that which is funny, and his caustic epigrams, applauded as they were in the camp of his partisans and bottle-mates, provoked bitter indignation among his enemies and grudgers.

In the early part of the Nineteenth Century, Russia, in more than one way, was still a crude country, and as any other country, she had her own prominent fools and influential philisters, displaying their distasteful self-conceit. And Poushkin simply could not desist from attacking those inflated guardians of public morals who earnestly believed that their reputation, like that of Cæsar's wife, was beyond reproach.

Finally, the poet did get himself in trouble, and in 1820, he was ordered to leave the capital for the South, ostensibly in connection with a government mission of some sort.

This "exile" brought Poushkin to the Caucasus, with its grandiose scenery, war-like spirit, and romantic atmosphere. It was only there that Poushkin began to take an interest in Byron, that sovereign of European thought, who "suffered, loved and damned", as our poet himself put it.

There was one aspect in Byron which particularly appealed to the rising genius of Russia: The Britisher hated conventions of every kind, and so did Poushkin. Both experienced fervent passion for freedom, and both despised hypocrisy, that traditional fig leaf of vice and evil. But even during his Byronic period, the Russian poet evinced remarkable latitude of thought and independence of opinion.

In Poushkin's intellectual diapason, Byron was but one of the many links, and the creator of *Childe Harold* never did succeed in depriving the merry little "Cricket" of his own original and self-reliant way. Besides, the humorous flavor, so pronounced in Poushkin, was almost non-existent in the British poet.

Byron was too rebellious to be free; Poushkin was too free to become rebellious. Byron damned, while Poushkin blessed this earth of ours. Byron suffered, but he would have been even more unhappy without his sufferings and sorrows; Poushkin suffered, too, but the theme of egocentric grief never could have made him happy. In Byron the element of challenge was a symptom of some fatal inner discord; in Poushkin, the impulsive protest was always mitigated by an inveterate longing for undisturbed harmony.

The pacific strain, indeed, was the dominant note of Poushkin's moral credo. Ever since his Lyceum days, he had been impressed with the ancient Hellenic tradition—an order of things which was primarily based upon the principles of rhythm and beauty. Naturally, he began to conceive life itself as a harmonic whole, of which art, to him, was but the loftiest manifestation. This balanced philosophy, so cardinally different from that of Byron's, made Poushkin immune to bitter disillusions and that gloomy frame of mind which sometimes is spoken of as "negativism."

Man's stoic approach to the enigma of Death is the surest touchstone of his deep penetration into the mystery of Life. In his own conduct, subconsciously, Poushkin seems to have been always influenced by Seneca's rigorous maxim: *"Long for the inevitable."* Fond as Poushkin was of this earthly existence, he never dreaded Death—the fatal end of all beginning.

At the age of seventeen, he paints this picture:

"Clear will come life's parting hours,
And our maiden playmates bright

Will collect our ashes light
Into feast urns, crowned with flowers."

The same sentiment, only in a humorous vein, was voiced by the poet, when he was thirty, in a letter to Pletnév, a Lyceum friend of his:

> "Look out! Spleen is more dangerous than cholera: Cholera kills merely the flesh, while spleen poisons the soul. Délvig died. Molchánov passed away. Wait,—Joukovsky will also die, and we will be dead, too. But life is still rich; we shall meet newcomers, and contract new friendships. Your daughter will grow, and will become engaged. We will turn into old dotards, and our wives—into old hags. But our children will be lovely, young and merry scamps; the boys will be engaged in mischief, the girls—the little rascals—will indulge in sentimentalism, and the sight of them will make us joyous. Nonsense, my dear: Nothing matters, so long as we live, and the day may come when, again, we shall be glad and happy."

Even more impressively Poushkin revealed this basic attitude toward life and death in his world-renowned *Stanzas:*

"When, through the noisy streets I'm strolling,
  Or 'mid the thoughtless rabble-streams,
Or where the temple-bells are tolling,—
  I give myself unto my dreams.

I say: the years are swiftly flying,
  We soon no longer shall appear,

In rest, beneath the death vault lying:
For some—the hour is drawing near.

I view yon oak with veneration,
And think: this patriarch, in his prime,
Will yet outlive my generation,
As he outlived my father's time.

And when a sweet babe I'm caressing,
I think: I go to give thee room;
I look on thee with farewell blessing:
'Tis mine to fade, and thine to bloom.

And ev'ry day and year I ponder
On what the future has in store;
What season will it be, I wonder,
When I shall pass and be no more?

. . . .

Where'er my senseless frame reposes,
When it decays, it cannot care,
Yet I would rest 'mid springing roses,
I fain would lie where all is fair.

Let fresh young life be ever playing
Around the portal of my tomb,
Let Nature ever be displaying
Her careless charm, her fadeless bloom." *

It is doubtful whether Byron could have written a reconciled poem such as this. . . .

And only three weeks before his death, Poushkin dedicated to his wife these few lines in which, again, he emphasized his calm and sedate realization of the inevitable:

---

* English version by Lindsay S. Perkins.

"'Tis time, my friend, 'tis time! For peace my heart is striving:
Time flies, days fade away, and ev'ry day is driving
Us nearer to the fatal end. But you and I—
We plan to live. Alas, some day we have to die.
Not happiness, but peace, is life's most ardent quest.
There now dwells but one desire in my breast:
As some exhausted slave, I dream of taking flight
To distant realms of harmony and pure delight."

Dostoievsky reflected much upon the grave problems with which mankind has always to contend, but he sadly failed to find the bridge between this world and the next. He was unable to comprehend the truth—so clearly understood by Poushkin—that Death is merely the eternal shadow and inseparable companion of everlasting Life. Dostoievsky's heroes are constantly tormented by the ghost of the Grim Reaper, and, like Flaubert, they are haunted by the sinister thought that visible and measurable reality is a veil, only here and there, covering the cold and silent continuity of Death. This fixed idea, like the majestically mournful leitmotiv of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, permeates all their somber rovings.

So it was also with Tolstoy: The more he had been thinking of Death; the more he had kept urging others not to be afraid of it,—the farther he departed from the only possible, genuinely Poushkin, and classically simple solution of the Sphinx's eternal riddle.

Amongst George Watts' most famous canvases there is one called "Love and Death". With intense pathos he portrays the idea—for his preëminently is ideographic art—of the tragic essence of inescapable Destiny: At the threshold of a human dwelling, Cupid, with his little hand extended, seeks in vain to arrest the march of inflexible Fate or Death. Only one obstacle stands between him and Life—"There Inside", one faint barrier—Love, that faithful companion of a heart intoxicated with happiness. The dreadful Guest has not yet reached the door. But in another fleeting moment he will enter the morose chamber, and the song of Love will be forever stilled, and the flame of Life will impotently die, and there will be Darkness.

Virtually all Russian writers, with the one exception of Poushkin, seem to have been oppressed by the foreboding of triumphant death. No doubt, this feeling, whether indirectly or otherwise, was born out of Byron's songs of universal grief and the sighs of his lamenting lyre. But sullen pessimism was utterly alien to Poushkin: Throughout his whole life, brief though it was, he has been guided by that vital urge for serene calmness of the spirit, which was the source of his sunny dreams and lucid inspiration.

VIII

The quality of mercy is not strain'd. . . .
SHAKESPEARE

WHAT is termed as Poushkin's Byronism was chiefly confined to his critical estimation of the psycho-social merits, or intrinsic value, of civilization. In *The Caucasian Captive, The Bakhchissaraí Fountain* and *The Gypsies*—the three principal poems relating to the Russian poet's Byronic period, he sought to ascertain the specific gravity of human progress devoid of spiritual refinement and culture. Does, indeed, civilization make for individual betterment of man, and does it tend to uplift his soul?

These questions Poushkin answered in the negative.

Tired of the monotony of civilized life, Aleko, the hero of *The Gypsies,* departs for the steppes of Bessarabia, and there, among the half-savage Bohemian tribes, he struggles to find a "new freedom". In this he fails emphatically because the deeply imbedded social prejudices retain a firm grip on him; he mistakes freedom for license, and he imposes his despotic will upon a community of peaceful nomads.

To this extent, Aleko's revolt against the irksome conventions of what Rousseau called the *"contrat social",* is superficial and formal; it does not go to the bottom of things, nor does it strike at the sources of commonplace morality. On the contrary, his ethical code, though revolutionary in appearance, is that of an averagely well-meaning bourgeois, in whom the property instinct, though latent, is often the governing motive of his everyday conduct. But to the primitive races, the generic notion of *jus utendi et abutendi,* that all-pervading principle of Roman law, is altogether alien and unknown.

Gypsy psychology is that of a happy little bird singing his carefree hymns to the blue sky and the golden Sun. Poushkin tells us of these placid moods in verses full of loveliness and unaffected charm:

"God's wee birdie is not grieving,
Knowing neither toil nor care,
And a nest he is not weaving
That shall weather lasting wear.
On the bough, the long night dreaming,
Shakes the dewdrops from his wings,
And when morn's red sun is beaming,
Hears the voice of God and sings.
After lovely Spring, the Summer
Brings the days of glowing heat;
Autumn then, a later comer,
Ushers in the fog and sleet.
Men are pining, men are grieving;
O'er the sea, with tireless wing,
Birdie for the South is leaving,
Flying onward to the Spring." *

---

* English version by Lindsay S. Perkins.

The impending conflict between Aleko, the haughty offshoot of self-conceited society, and the gypsies, those humble sons of virginal Nature, culminates in a complete and stormy break between the two.

Aleko, when talking to Zemfíra, the Bohemian girl with whom he falls in love, eloquently denounces "civilization"; he scoffs at the slavery of those who belong to the educated strata. According to him, crowded cities, the living emblems of our age, are unbearable:

"Men live fenced in like cattle there;
They do not breathe the morning air,
Nor do they scent the meadows sweet.
They are ashamed to love, to think;
They sell their freedom, dull their brains,
Before their idols cringe and sink,—
They long for money and for chains."

Still, Aleko himself proves a captive of blind egoism, and this vice he inherits from that very society which he professes to despise. He loves Zemfíra, and, for a short while, she also takes a fancy to him. But free is a gypsy's heart: it loves just as long as it whims, and it will be guided by no imposed precepts or formal restraint. To Aleko, this is beyond comprehension: he seeks to make the sentiment of emotion subject to the law of property just as much as any merchandise displayed in a shop window. The abrupt finale is reached when

Zemfíra becomes infatuated with one of her young tribesmen. She then turns away from Aleko as naturally and freely as she had given herself to him, and our hero, in a wild outburst of jealousy and wrath, kills his self-willed and unfaithful sweetheart.

The dramatic effect of Aleko's deed is made still more graphic by the concluding monologue of Zemfíra's father, who, in a purely Poushkin fashion, takes a forgiving attitude towards the murderer of his daughter. In the mind of the old Bohemian, individual freedom cannot exist alongside blood and terror. And so, instead of taking revenge against Aleko, he merely orders him to leave the camp, where true liberty and undisturbed peace are the only laws by which everybody must abide. And he says:

. . . .
"Do leave us, self-conceited man!
We're wild and have no use for laws,
We punish not, we torture not,
We dread the sight of bloody claws,
And we won't share a slayer's lot.
. . . .
Farewell, depart from us in peace!"

The merciful hand of Poushkin never strikes an enemy that is no longer menacing. Despite his cruel crime, Aleko is crushed by his own vain passion. He will return to those sad realms where men, "like cattle", are herded in the prisons of modern civilization. This will be his punishment, his doom.

Such is Poushkin's philosophy always. One more example suffices: In 1821, Napoleon expired in exile on the island of St. Helena. He was Russia's most formidable enemy, and his invasion shook the mighty Empire to its foundations. How did Poushkin react to the passing of that dishonored favorite of Fortune?—To him he dedicated a poem full of eulogy and compassion. Its last eight lines give a magnificent proof of the greatness of our poet's soul:

"But shame and curses without number
Upon that reptile head be laid,
Whose senseless blame shall vex the slumber
Of him—that sad discrownèd shade!
Praised be! He showed the Russian nation
Their lofty fate, and even stilled,
From exile's gloom, for man's elation,
Eternal liberty he willed." *

Again, here, a bitter discord resulting from the historical strife between two elemental forces, Napoleon and Russia, resolves itself into a soothing accord.

In this way Poushkin overcomes the Byronic disease, emerging from the turmoil of his inner doubts and struggles as a great master of all-conquering harmony.

---

* First four lines, with corrections, taken from Thomas B. Shaw's English version of Poushkin's poem *Napoleon.*

IX

Not every Perugino can claim a Raphael as his disciple.

OSTRACISED from the two capitals, in 1824, Poushkin was still journeying in Southern Russia. On several occasions before, his political reputation had been questioned by the omniscient police of those days and, while living in Odessa, Poushkin again invoked upon himself the displeasure of the Government: Accused of "bad behavior", but more particularly, of having made a casual atheistic remark, Poushkin was ordered to leave the Black Sea metropolis and to retire to Mikháilovskoie, his own estate in the Province of Pskov. He arrived at this new station of his exile in the Autumn of the same year, and there he dwelt fully twenty-four weary months.

Much as the enforced sojourn in provincial seclusion was annoying, it proved extremely beneficial to the mental development and artistic achievements of our poet. In rustication, he undertook a serious study of Shakespeare and Russian history. It was then that he conceived one of his *opera magna*—the tragedy *Borís Godounóv.*

This work in Poushkin's creative life proved a definite departure from subjective lyricism. Here, he resigned his individuality in favor of historical objectivism. For a lyrical poet *par excellence,* a feat such as this must be considered a signal victory which, in the case of Poushkin, became the stepping stone to his subsequent literary triumphs.

In devising the plan of *Borís Godounóv,* Poushkin, emulating Shakespeare's example, eliminated the entire etiquette and pedantry of conventional pseudo-classicism. Very justly, the Russian poet perceived the greatest glory of Shakespeare in his sagacious understanding of the human soul, with all its shifting moods, subdued longings, tempered and untempered passions, vexing doubts, mad jealousies, overwhelming hatreds, and triumphant love. Out of these elements Shakespeare's dramas were carved for eternity, and it is upon this material that the dynamics of his plays, their plots and conflicts, were conditioned.

Poushkin himself was graced with a keen dramatic sense and an almost instinctive ability to conjecture the approaching cataclysm of two colliding passions—that impact which is the inevitable result of two active forces mutually challenging each other.

In the arrangement of the scenes Poushkin adopted Shakespeare's architectural freedom and his disregard for any ossified rules on the place and time of the action. It was also under the influence of the British dramatist that Poushkin introduced in his play blank verse in artful combination with prose. No one in Russia before Poushkin resorted to this mixed style in which *Borís Godounóv* was moulded.

Apparently, Poushkin was satisfied with his new work:

> "I congratulate you, my darling," he wrote to Viazemsky—"upon a romantic tragedy, in which Borís Godounóv is the leading character. My tragedy is completed. I read it over to myself aloud and started clapping my hands and exclaiming: 'Look at Poushkin! Isn't he clever!' "

The problem which Poushkin had set out to solve was, indeed, a difficult one: he sought to reveal in his creation the true atmosphere of the early part of the Seventeenth Century, which, in Russian history, is known as "The Confused Period". In the whole gallery of its actors, Czar Borís himself was the most enigmatic and momentous figure: A man of humble descent and Tartar extraction, Borís, in his struggle for supremacy—first, under John the Terrible, and later, under his weakling son, Czar Fëdor—had lived through a trying school of court intrigues, endless envy and political reverses.

Boundlessly ambitious, Borís, in his thoughts and actions, was constantly guided by one dominant motive—his passionate desire to ascend the Throne. Even before becoming Czar of Russia, and while Fëdor was still reigning, Godounóv attained dictatorial power. But Fëdor had an adolescent brother, Dmitry, who was to have been his lawful successor. That child stood as an insurmountable obstacle to Godounóv's cherished goal.

One day Dmitry was found mysteriously murdered in a town not far from Moscow. At once, the hundred-mouthed goddess started spreading rumors that Borís had inspired the murder. But from that time on, his road to the Crown of Russia was clear and now he could be patiently awaiting Fëdor's natural death. Meanwhile, Godounóv kept watching and scrutinizing his Sovereign's character, cleverly using to his own advantage the Czar's kind-hearted disposition, with all its indecision and morbid meekness.

Count Alexis Tolstoy, in his tragedy *Czar Fëdor Ioánnovich,* brilliantly contrasted the domineering character of Borís with Fëdor's weak and apathetic temper. Says Godounóv:

"A mountain, huge and high,
Was Czar Iván. The subterranean shocks,
From its tenebrous depths, would shake the plain,
Or, from its peak, a sudden burst of flame
Would cast upon the earth both death and ruin.
Czar Fëdor is not thus. I would compare
Him rather with a cleft in open field:
The crevices and porous ground about
Are carefully concealed by flowers in the grass.
Incautiously, when wandering near by,
The shepherd and the herd slip down the pit.
A legend lives amongst our village folk:
It is believed that long ago a church

Had sunk into the earth, and on that spot,
A hollow—huge and dark—had formed itself;
And people say that when the sky is clear,
And calm prevails, from down below, soft sounds
Of pealing bells are sometimes heard.
As holy, but as treacherous a place,
Appears to me Czar Fëdor. In his soul,
Which stays wide open to both foe and friend,
There always dwell, as gentle melodies
Of chiming bells, sweet prayers, love and mercy.
And yet, what good is all this clemency,
Indeed, what good is it—without foundation?
'Tis now seven years since Czar Iván
Has swept o'er Russia like a mighty storm.
For seven years, with greatest care and pain,
Stone after stone, I have been daily building
That edifice; that great and sacred temple;
That potent state; that new and prudent country;
That Russia, so beloved by me, whose fate
Absorbs my thoughts through weary, sleepless
nights.
In vain! . . . With sorrow do I feel that I
Am building over an abyss, and suddenly,
That edifice may crumble, for the humblest
Among my enemies, of his volition,
Can sway the Sov'reign's meek and tender heart,
Uprooting those desires which I inspire."

Fëdor having died, Borís was soon proclaimed Czar of Russia. In Poushkin's tragedy, he becomes the focal figure around which, treacherously, intrigues, jealousies and hatreds, begin to weave. The rumor of Dmitry's mysterious death suggests to a young impostor, an obscure monk in the Chóudov

Monastery, the daring plot of assuming the name and title of the slain boy. The pseudo-Czarevich flees to Poland, and there he convinces the grandees that he is Dmitry, who had been miraculously saved from the hands of Godounóv's hirelings. The ghost of the martyred youth menacingly looms in the dark background of popular discontent spreading throughout troubled Russia.

The climax of the tragedy comes almost at the beginning of the play: Already in his second appearance the Czar divulges the secret of his mortifying distress. Even at this early stage one can discern the sounds *funèbres* of the wrathful hymn:

"Dies irae, dies illa!
Solvet saeclum in favilla.
Judex ergo cum sedebit—
Quidquid latet, adparebit,
Nil inultum remanebit."

This theme of expiation is preëminently Poushkin's; he constantly reverts to the strange law of retribution, which to Dostoievsky is the source of man's inner punishment.

In an impressive monologue Godounóv ponders over the real cause of his psychic malady. He says:

"I did ascend to sovereign power.
It is six years, or nearly so, that I
Am reigning peacefully, and yet, my soul
Of happiness remains devoid . . . . . .
. . . .

In vain have sorcerers kept telling me
That long and peaceful will my reign continue! . . .
But life and power fail to bring me joy:
I feel ill-luck and Heaven's wrath approaching.
I am unhappy. Haven't I sought to give
My people peace, prosperity and fame,
And win their love through generosity?!—
Alas! My hopes proved altogether vain:
The rabble hates the sight of living power;
They seem to love those only who are dead.
'Tis folly when, by popular applause
Or indignation wild, our hearts are shaken.
Almighty God has struck our land with famine;
The people started howling in distress;
And then to them all grain stores I threw open;
I gave them gold; I found for them employment:
And yet, they were the first to damn and curse me!
Their homes were razed by all-devouring fire,—
So I have promptly built for them new homes.
Yet, they accused me of committing arson!—
Such is the rabble's verdict, such their love!
Amongst my kin I looked for consolation:
A happy bride I meant to make my daughter,—
Like storm—alas!—death sweeps away her bridegroom . . .
Again, false rumors viciously are spread
That I am guilty, I, the ill-starred father! . . .
Whoever dies, I am the murderer:
I was the one who hastened Fëdor's death,
I was the one who poisoned the Czarina,
My humble sister-nun. . . . All crimes are mine!
I feel, there's nothing in this earthly life,
Amidst its grief, that gives us lasting peace;
Yes, naught . . . unless it be our conscience—

Clear conscience—that will always win and triumph
O'er wickedness, o'er dark and vicious slander;
Still, if it has but one, though slightest stain,
One single stain, that happens to besmirch it,—
Then all is lost: as in the flames of plague
The soul will burn, the heart be filled with poison;
Like hammers will reproaches smite the ears;
Disgust will rise, and turn the tortured head,
And bloodstained little boys will haunt and threaten,—
And one does long to flee, but whither? . . . Dreadful!
Yea, wretched he whose conscience is not clear."

The shadow of the murdered child deprives Borís of the greatest treasure, his inner peace. Though dead, Dmitry lives in the Czar's afflicted conscience; nor can the menacing existence of a phantom be terminated by either poison or dagger. And so the bloodstained boy will become the lasting punishment for a grim and ghastly crime; he will assume his interrupted life in the guise of still another phantom—the False Dmitry, whose seemingly insane adventure will shake the rocks of a mighty Czardom.

Masterfully is Dmitry's nature revealed in Poushkin's play. The adventurous *parvenu* changes from one phase of his intricate personality to another: In Pimen's Cell, he is still a romantic dreamer; in the frontier Inn—an audacious bandit; in the Polish Castle—a shrewd impostor and suave diplomat; in the famous Fountain Scene —a passionately reckless lover, and we surmise that on the battle field he will prove a valiant soldier.

With all this, Dmitry is merely an episodic character: his ambitious plans of a bold pretender are cleverly used by Russia's enemies to their advantage. The fugitive monk clearly understands his rôle, and in the Fountain Scene, when speaking to Marína, he utters these challenging words:

"Dost thou believe that I am fearing thee?—
That trusted more will be a Polish maiden
Than Russia's Princely Heir?—Still, thou shouldst know
That neither King nor Pope nor any Noble
Place faith in that which I am telling them.
What do they care if I am really Dmitry?—
I am a mere excuse for wars and strife,
And this is all they care about."

Godounóv dies before False Dmitry has time to succeed in his plot. At the deathbed of the Czar, the boyars take an oath of allegiance to Fëdor, his adolescent son. But when the rebel forces triumph over the Moscow troops, the treacherous courtiers strangle their defenceless Sovereign. Again, this act of Destiny is but another way of handling the familiar "crime and punishment" theme. Ostensibly Borís dies reconciled with himself; still, the heavy hand of Fate strikes his beloved heir; with this death the Godounóv line comes to an end.

Though over a century old, *Borís Godounóv* today is just as fresh and immaculate as at the time when it was written; its characters are just as truthful and appealing; its dialogues and style—just as pure and perfect; its ideas—just as compelling and profoundly true. The critics' grumblings at minor flaws in the construction of the play are long forgotten, and Poushkin's great tragedy, outliving time, remains, as heretofore, one of the loftiest and most inspired creations of the human mind.

X

In the great, as in the little, the greatness of art may be revealed.

BORÍS GODOUNÓV has been warmly appreciated by the Russian public and was much treasured by Poushkin himself. Still, this tragedy was neither his concluding word, nor his greatest contribution to Russian dramaturgic repertory. After all, in *Borís Godounóv,* by the very nature of an historical drama, Poushkin was confined to specific situations and authentic characters; these, in a limited way only, permitted the treatment of such moral principles and psychological problems as might be called generic, primordial or inherent in human nature. Truly, history has its philosophy as philosophy has its history; yet, poetic works, designed to revive determined epochs, with their well-settled social backgrounds, necessarily circumscribe the scope and diapason of the artist's creative imagination by the element of historical reality or truth.

But the realism of Poushkin was broader than that approach to life which, for its expression, requires a chronological date or geographic localization. Nor were his taste for the dramatic and his passion for the unique limited to national tradition with its inevitable *couleur locale.* On the contrary, as Dostoievsky justly observed, Poushkin's nationalism did not atrophy his ingrained faculty—encountered in no other world artist—of reincarnating himself in the spirit, soul and living style of every other nation. His, then, was a realism of the universally real, which evades every barrier of space and every impediment of time.

For the interpretation of the immense, eternal and super-national, though unquestionably real, Poushkin devised a peculiar form of "Miniature Tragedies", which no one before—nor any one since—has dared to touch. In these brilliant sparkles of genius, one focal idea, one tragic antinomy between two fundamental laws or governing passions, is revealed with astounding economy of verbal material: the sentences are condensed to a point where it becomes impossible to omit from the text even a single line or seemingly casual word. Nor is it possible to change in any manner the syntactic construction of the phrases and their logical arrangement. Although, here, Poushkin preferably uses the five foot iambic blank verse, the meter remains unnoticed, or rather it conveys the impression of metric prose. This, indeed, is mathematics of literary thought. And then the psychological *crescendo* develops with such swiftness, impetus and sureness that one simply has no time to dwell upon anything else than the suddenly bursting storm of the crisis and its impending finale.

Poushkin's miniature theatre comprises four tragedies of this kind: *The Miser Knight, Mozart and Salieri, The Stone Guest,* and *The Feast During the Plague,* and, besides, the dramatic fragment *A Scene from Faust.* The first four plays were written by Poushkin in less than one month.

The Faust Scene—only a hundred and thirteen lines long—is a casual dialogue between the learned Doctor and his deceitful Leporello.

Faust is in a fatigued mood, and he says:

"I am weary, Demon.

Mephisto

Can't be helped!
Such is your everlasting fate
Which mortals never can surmount.
All creatures, which can contemplate,
Know boredom, be it on account
Of sloth and idleness, or whether
From over-work. One's faith is strong,

The other lost it altogether.
These are fed up with joy,—those long
For joy in vain. And yawningly
All live. And yawning waits for thee
The grave. So why shouldn'st thou yawn, too?"

Indeed, as Lao-Tze remarked: True words are not pleasant; pleasant words are not true, and Faust, the *homo sapiens,* knows that Mephisto has spoken the truth. Like a faithful mirror, the mocking ghost reflects Faust's own morbid tedium, that painful cleavage by which he is torn asunder: his mind, though filled with learning, is full of emptiness, and his "canon of reason" fatally assumes the form of an apotheosis of negation. This is the source of his weary loneliness and all-absorbing spleen. Still, the vital instinct compels him to cling to routine existence which, he knows, is hopelessly futile.

To Faust, the realm of learning is a world of boredom, and he exclaims:

"No life in knowledge, no delight:
I damned its false, seducing light."

But life in general has no solution to offer: even the sweet reminiscences about Gretchen are utterly ruined by Mephisto's cynical suggestion that, at the very moment when, in the silence of the night, the two palpitating hearts were ready to fuse in one chord of triumphant love, there was a third one present, a *tertius gaudens,* the evil genius himself, who cleverly instilled into the mind of Faust the poison of amorous illusions from which he later turns with horror and disgust.

The tragedy of ennui extends beyond this physical life of ours: even the obligingly gaping grave becomes the symbol of yawning Death.

In this vicious circle boredom reigns supreme, and solely because Faust's mind is weary and his soul craves for distraction of some kind, he orders the Demon to sink a schooner with a load of human lives.

In Russian literature, Poushkin's Faust gave birth to a long range of "needless beings" tormented by the incurable disease of modern skepsis, with its reflective reasoning, primordial weariness and undermining doubts. The pathological schism in Faust's consciousness, the sad sounds of his interminable elegy

"Zwei Seelen wohnen—ach! in meiner Brust:—
Die eine will sich von der and'ren trennen"

will be echoed and reëchoed by the successive generations of Russian Hamlets—by Lermontov's Pechórin, Turgenev's Rudin and Dostoievsky's Raskolnikov.

Perhaps even more pathetic than *Faust* is *The Miser Knight*—another magnificent creation of Poushkin's.

In this miniature play, composed of merely three fragmentary scenes, Poushkin depicts a sharp collision between two passions—avarice and dissipation. All his life the Baron, an old mediæval Knight, has been haunted by the sight of gold. Coin after coin, he has been adding to his hoard, and now the silent vaults under his stern castle conceal many a coffer filled with the precious gleaming metal. His is not a mere attraction to money, but a maniacal adoration, a religious cult, in which not the objectively real, but its imaginary reflection, acquires the guise of reality itself. He loves wealth not for its own sake, but because of its mystical and potential power. He meditates:

"Indeed, what doesn't bow to me?—Like some
Dark Demon, I, from hence, can rule the world:
A whim—and stately mansions will arise,
And lovely nymphs, in gayly smiling crowds,
My gorgeous parks will suddenly invade;
And Muses, too, will come and pay their tribute;
And genius free to me will humbly bow;
And virtue, and assiduous, sleepless labor
Submissively will wait for my reward.
A whistle is enough—and, timidly,
Will bloodstained villainy creep up to me,
Will lick my hands, will look into mine eyes,
My will in them attempting to discern.
Obedient is all to me, but I—
To nothing. Yes, I soar above all wishes.
I'm calm. I know my might, and this conviction
Is all I need. . . ."

The Baron has a son by the name of Albert, a careless youthful spendthrift, whose only concern are women, feasts and tournaments. Albert is the Baron's *bête noire,* and a clash between the two cannot be avoided. The miser father divulges his hidden fears, while attending in silent solitude a strange feast, a sinister orgy of cupidity, which he has arranged for himself in the dark vaults of his castle:

"Today a feast I'm staging for myself:
A candle I shall light before each coffer,
And then I shall unlock them all, and shall
Be looking on at these gold glaring heaps.
(Lights the candles and unlocks every coffer, one after the other).
I reign supreme! . . . What an enchanting glare! . . .
Obedient and mighty is my Kingdom!
In it—my honor, happiness and fame. . . .
I reign supreme! . . . And yet, who will succeed me
In my majestic heritage?—My heir?—
That spendthrift fool! . . . That youthful dissipator!
That faithful friend of rackish debauchees!—
As soon as I be dead, he will descend
To these pacific, dumb and silent vaults,
Amidst a crowd of flatt'ring greedy courtiers,
And stealing from my frigid corpse the keys,
With merry laughs, he will unlock the coffers,
And my belovèd treasures will begin
To flow through silken pockets full of holes!
He will destroy these sacred old containers!
He'll mix with dirt the Kingly holy oil!—
He'll dissipate!" . . . .

The peak of the miser's tragedy is reached with the words: *"He'll dissipate."*

In a conversation with the Duke, the Sovereign of the Land, the Baron falsely accuses Albert of an attempt to rob him. The son happens to overhear this calumny; he rushes in and calls his father a liar. And then, the old Knight, in a classically chivalresque fashion, throws his glove into Albert's face. The son catches it with the ironically gallant remark:

"Merci. This is my father's only gift."

The emotion caused by the violent dispute proves too great a strain on the old Baron; he collapses and dies exclaiming: "I'm choking! The keys! Where are my keys?"

Gogol's Plushkin in *The Dead Souls* is a wretchedly petty and untidy miser. Shylock and Harpagon are also utterly repulsive. But Poushkin masterfully avoids introducing into the treatment of the ugly sin—and avarice certainly is a sin—the element of the banal and mean. His miser is preëminently a *Knight,* and his vice is purified by passion—the trivial is purged in tragic atmosphere.

The same creative trait, but even stronger, appears in *Mozart and Salieri*. Here, too, the meanest of all vices—envy—is cast through the prism of the pitiful and personal drama of a studious, but wingless artisan, a sad specialist, who labors day and night in an endeavor to disclose the catechistic rules of counterpoint and the mysteries divine of harmony.

A stubborn ascetic of Art, Salieri finally succeeds in developing a "musical ear" and achieving "obedient but dry agility" in his fingers. He has won a reputation but not fame.

In days long past, Salieri used to envy Haydn, but Haydn died. He now envies Mozart, on whom the heedless gods have abundantly bestowed two priceless gifts—a lucid talent and radiant inspiration. All by himself, incessantly brooding over the glory of Mozart's genius compared with his own dull and sterile skill, Salieri gradually conceives and silently nourishes the base intent of getting rid of Mozart:

"What use is there in him?—Like some pure
cherub,
From Heaven a few chants he brought to us,
As if to wake in us, poor sons of dust,
A wingless hope, and then to wing away.
So do depart! The sooner, then, the better!"

Many a year ago, Salieri loved a woman: Izóra died bequeathing but one token of her love to him —a phial of deadly poison. All these years, he kept it hidden, just waiting for the moment when he could use it to "remove" a triumphant rival, whoever he might be. And Mozart did become his rival.

One day, happy as a sunbeam, Mozart burst into Salieri's house, and, rather casually, he started playing on the piano a musical creation of his own which, only the night before, he had composed. With the last sounds, turning to Salieri, he asked:

"How do you like this?

Salieri

What depth!
What daring and what perfect harmony!
Thou, Mozart, art a god, and yet, thou know'st
This not: I know this, I."

And Mozart:

"Oh really?! That may be! . . .
But hungry is my deity."

Salieri hastens to invite his friend to dine with him at the Golden Lion Inn. Mozart accepts the invitation and leaves Salieri. Now, the caudal sting of envy pierces the wound of Salieri's heart. No longer can he resist his fate. At last, the poison of Izóra will serve its tragically useful end; it will silence Mozart's seraphic hymns:

"The time has come!—Oh, sacred gift of love,
Transfuse thyself into the cup of friendship!"

The concluding scene transpires in the Inn. Salieri commits the vile crime, and, already poisoned, Mozart plays his immortal *Requiem*. Suddenly, he begins to feel dazed and drowsy. He bids his friend goodbye. Like Poe's hero, Salieri could have whispered the ironic *"In pace requiescat"* farewell, for soon the Cherub, homeward bound, will have started winging back to Paradise.

By means of this terrestrial murder Salieri seeks to remedy an accidental error of Heaven—that vacuum of which Spinoza's geometrical God is the unchallenged Potentate. To Salieri's cold and calculating mind, supreme justice must be founded upon the principle of universal *order,* presupposing an *even* distribution of material and spiritual riches; but in the phenomenon of Mozart—and Salieri conceives in him, not a human being composed of blood and flesh, but merely an abstract phenomenon—the democratic law of equality has been offended and disturbed. Salieri's is a murder growing out of frigid dialectics. In this sense, he is the undying prototype of all rational murderers, and, undeniably, Poushkin's Salieri is the forefather of Dostoievsky's Smerdiakov.

In *Mozart and Salieri,* as in his other four miniatures, the tragedy develops with simplicity and inflexible vigor reminding one of the greatest creations of Sophocles or Shakespeare.

The linguistic properties of all these unequalled and unchallenged *chefs-d'œuvre* of world dramaturgy are absolutely flawless. Even if there were nothing more in Poushkin than these few hundred superbly chiselled and compressed lines, he might have been justly claiming his place among the immortals of all nations and all times.

XI

The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,
They all are fire and every one doth shine,
But there's but one in all doth hold his place . . .
Julius Cæsar

SHAKESPEARE

THE dramatic instinct of Poushkin, which inspired him to create *Borís Godounóv* and the whole group of miniature tragedies, found its final, most powerful and most perfect expression in *The Bronze Horseman,* a poem in rhyme and tetrametric iamb, dedicated to the Mighty Peter as he had been cast on the Falconette equestrian monument.

In *The Bronze Horseman,* Peter is shown in the process of a titanic struggle with three elements: The impersonal will of Nature; the passive, but elemental, resistance of obsolete Russia to his daring projects, and finally, the blind element of the vulgar majority revolting against the volcanic will of the Russian Cæsar.

First scene. Peter, statuesque and silent, stands on the marshy banks of the Neva, gazing into the misty distance. This is a picture of a great thought's birth: Peter decides to erect in the wilderness of the Northern forests, on the dreary Finnish swamps, a new capital for that State which is destined to become the greatest Empire in the Universe. His decision is dictated by considerations of sovereign importance: From hence, Russia will command the approaches to the sea; this will be her "window into Europe", and here will be laid the firm foundation of a new era—the Moscow *Czardom* shall yield to the Russian *Empire.*

Peter knows that, by undertaking this heroic action, he is challenging at once two elements: Nature, and Russia herself, dreadful in her motionless silence, inertly opposing his creative visions. But Peter is going to subdue both elements. Along his path he will smash all obstacles; he will transgress all barriers; he will crush all resistance. Peter will conquer.

Even in the Prologue the Great Monarch appears triumphant. He masters Nature which bows to his bold determination. Only one century later

"........ the youthful town,
Of Northern lands the graceful wonder,
Arose in splendor and renown
'Midst swamps and woods extending yonder.
Where, lonely, in the days long past,
The Finnish fisherman forlorn
In somber waters used to cast
His old worn fishnet ev'ry morn,—
Today—how diff'rent all looks there:
'Long lively shores rich mansions glare,
And stately buildings shine and tower;

From lands remote and near, in pack,
Ships glide along the river track,
At harbors docking ev'ry hour;
In granite Neva now is clad,
Above her tides suspended bridges,
While dark green gardens cover ridges
Of islands yonder smiling glad."

The impossible has been achieved: the fogs of the Finnish swamps are now miraculously compressed into the granite of the lustrous city.

But Russia?—How does Peter conquer her?—Says Poushkin:

"And 'fore the new born city now
Old Moscow lost its ancient pride,
As does the dow'ger Empress bow
To the ascending Sov'reign's bride."

The second scene unfolds itself shortly thereafter. In 1824, upon the city of St. Peter a great catastrophe was wrought: The Neva overflowed her banks and inundated the capital. This calamity tore out of the mouth of Alexander the Blessed a despairing exclamation:

". . . . With *God's* grim elements
The *Czars* are helpless to contend. . . ."

Still, amidst general consternation, one remains motionless, statuesque, unyielding.

That is Peter.

The terrible element of revolting Nature proves powerless to shake the element of Peter's iron will. Around him—chaos of wildly roaring waves; fearful groans of a hurricane; and yonder—in the distance, panic-stricken, timidly cowering, stands Eugene, the so-called hero of the poem, one of those humble, lilliputian specimens of the human race whose name is—Legion. Majestic and grand, full of haughty disdain, Peter turns his back to him:

> "In heights above, unshaken, soaring
> Above the floods of Neva roaring,
> His hand extended with bold force,
> The giant sits on his bronze horse."

Peter remains motionless.

Such is his first encounter with the element of mediocrity.

Insistently, Poushkin emphasizes the colorless and impersonal character of Eugene. Even his family name is not mentioned; his are undetermined features of a person without a personality.

Like Gogol's hero in *The Cloak,* Eugene is only a microscopical screw, which shyly participates in the work of an enormous and soulless state machine. But what he is doing, how he is performing his routine functions,—we are not told.

Among the many tragedies caused by the inundation, there is one about which Poushkin tells a sad story: Eugene loves Parásha—a humble girl—living somewhere on the outskirts of the distressed city. After a stormy night, the Neva waters finally receded. Now Eugene speeds to his Parásha. But she is no more: She perished in the rioting floods, and even the wooden house in which she used to dwell, was washed away into the sea.

Eugene's is a personal drama; it is the grief of a weak creature dissolved in the incoherent grey multitude of a muzzled populace. The human is crushed by the weight of the superhuman.

As a unit, Eugene is impotent and not dangerous in the least. Yet, that same unit, multiplied by a countless quantity of similar units, is converted into something menacing, growing to the proportions of an element—the colossal aggregate of the human mass—the most treacherous of all elements.

One more scene. Some months later, the air of the capital was again breathing with storm. A gale was swelling up the turbulent and unruly waters of the Neva, and it was night. On his way home, Eugene was passing by the bronze monument of the Northern Titan:

"Terrific stands he in the dark!
And on his brow what thoughtful mark!
What power looms in him and grows!
And in that steed, what fiery force!
Where art thou speeding, noble horse,
And where shallst thou thine hoofs repose?—
Oh, mighty Potentate of Fate!
Didn'st thou, as with an iron rein,
Jerk o'er a precipice in strain,
Throw on her haunches Russia great?!"

Long did Eugene gaze at the mighty statue, and vividly came to his mind the sorrowful death of poor Parásha. Gradually, a feeling of revolt arose in his breast against him by whose despotic whim the capital was built. As if afflicted by some dark power, grinding his teeth, clenching his fist, he rancorously whispered: "All right, miraculous constructor!" . . . This insane, but evil-wishing threat of a petty creature, suddenly makes the august cast of Peter quiver. Instantly, his face is lit by anger, and the hitherto motionless Sovereign begins a wild pursuit of the helpless slave. Eugene is overwhelmed with fear,

> "He runs, and hears behind his back,
> As though of thunder dreadful rumbles,
> Of heavy leaps incessant grumbles
> On pavement stones that shake and crack.—
> The moon illumes the giant Norseman,
> His hand extended with bold force,
> Pursues his chase the Iron Horseman
> On that loud clanging bounding horse."

From that nightmare, Eugene never recovers. Like Parásha, he falls a victim of the Great Peter.

Strange seems this unequal struggle between the Bronze Giant and a paltry clerk, who later will transform himself into Gogol's Akáki Akákievich, Turgenev's Koúzvokin, Chekhov's Cháflia, into a dull anthropoid vegetating in interminable multiplications throughout the vast and endless spaces of the proud Empire. But Poushkin prophetically foresaw that precisely the impersonal human mass, the element of the Little, will become the most dreadful and hardly escapable threat to the Great, of which the Bronze Horseman is the immortal Symbol.

XII

L'enfance passe, mais l'enfantillage reste.

STILL as a young man, burning with passion and untempered longings, Poushkin arrived in Mikháilovskoie. He left the place of his exile with a mind fully matured and his creative "I" brought in accord with the world around him. By this time he had reached perfection in his poetic work, giving full exhibition of his mighty genius.

Baudelaire remarked once that Delacroix, the famous French animalist, "was passionately in love with passion, and coldly determined to seek the means of expressing passion in the most graphic form." Such had also become Poushkin as a result of his long seclusion and uninterrupted mental growth. Master, indeed, of form, he learned the secret of unmistakably balancing the outward mode of artistic workmanship with the inner substance of his creative dreams. Poushkin, as poet, had reached the state of final equilibrium.

The purely poetical phase of his work came to a climax, attaining that level of excellency which no Russian poet has since exceeded. Today, the wreath of Poushkin's rhymes lies in the marble Pantheon of Fame, as ever, fresh, unfading, amaranthine.

In words full of enthusiasm and praise, Bielinsky summarized the signal qualities of Poushkin's poetry:

> "Poushkin's verse"—he said—"in its original creations, made, as it were, a sharp turn, a definite departure from the prior history of Russian poetry, breaking with its traditional forms and revealing something hitherto unknown . . . And what a verse it is! Antique plasticism and classical simplicity blend in perfect harmony with the alluring melodies of the romantic rhyme. The entire acoustic wealth, the full might of the Russian tongue, are expressed here with astounding completeness: now it is tender, sweet and soft, like murmurs of the waves; now it is ductile and pliant as wax; flaring like lightning; pure and transparent as crystal; fragrant as the breath of Spring; hard and vigorous like the blows of a glaive in the hands of a Knight."

Temperamentally, however, Poushkin had never really settled down. Quoting Chénier he said about himself: *"Tel j'étais autrefois, et tel je suis encore."* Here is his confession:

> "Such as I used to be before, such am I still:
> So careless, amorous. You know, my friends, what thrill
> The beautiful evokes in my imagination!

What timid tenderness, what hidden animation!
Hasn't Love bestowed on me much worry and
much plight?
And haven't I been struggling, like a fledgling
kite,
In the seductive nets which Cypris threw around
me?—
And yet, despite the many thorns with which life
crowned me,
Alas! I still am worshipping new idols."

Released from his estate, he dashed back to St. Petersburg and Moscow, and there, once more, he was drawn into the vortex of social turmoil. Some of his lyrical verses of that period are strikingly suggestive of his blazing moods and unabated passion for Cypris, the Goddess of Passion. For a while, he was in love with Countess Zakrevsky, a beautiful, though somewhat amoral woman, whom he himself so graphically described:

"By stormy passion driven forth,
And with her sultry soul all glaring,
Amongst ye, matrons of the North,
She reappears at times. With daring,
She disregards all world's relations:
A lawless comet, in her course,
She speeds along with reckless force,
Amidst well settled constellations."

And, of course, besides the Countess, there were other women—some more, others less, responsive—but each one, in her own whimsical way, most captivating and charming: Catherine Timásheva, for instance, or Oushakóva, or Olénina, to whom he penned this musing wee-bit on her fair self and her occasional swoops upon the Northern Capital:

"Pompous city! City lean!
Servile spirit! Stately glare!
Skies above—in pallid green.
Boredom. Granite. Chilly air!
Yet, on guard I should be put,
For in our urban whirl
Treads, at times, a little foot,
And there weaves a golden curl."

But to one of the less responsive of his inamoratas the poet dedicated *The Nightingale,* a half elegiac little poem:

"In Spring, when silent parks are covered by the veil
Of night,—in vain sings to the rose the eastern nightingale:
The rose does not respond, and through the slumb'ring hours,
The hymns of love fail to awake the queen of flowers.
Thus also are thy songs, oh poet, sung in vain:
In frigid beauty they evoke no joy, no pain;
Her bloom thrills thee; thy heart is filled with admiration,
And yet, her heart stays cold, and void of animation."

So Poushkin lived through the last years of his free bachelor life, as it were, in an endless amorous rondo.

However, the latter part of the Twenties' marked a new tendency in Poushkin's literary evolution: Slowly he started deviating from pure lyricism, paying ever-increasing attention to popular themes, prose and historical research. In the early Thirties', in addition to his miniature tragedies, he wrote several folk tales, among which three—*The Tale About Czar Saltán, The Tale About the Fisherman and the Fish* and *Coq d'Or*—are very properly regarded as creations unsurpassed in naïve sincerity and poetic style.

XIII

Tales are dreams, and yet they tend
To promote some useful end.
Poushkin

For some reason, Russian writers, with the exception of Dostoievsky and a few others, have paid little attention to the place which popular legends and folk tales occupy in the literary heritage of Poushkin, even though this particular group of his creations is extremely characteristic of our poet's cardinal trait—his faithful nationalism, of which Arína Rodiónovna was the half conscious beginning and the *Coq d'Or* the brilliant conclusion.

Poushkin had an instinctive love for that which is being reverently carried and lastingly fondled in the bosom of a people's consciousness, becoming blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of national life. And there was nothing more popular—in Russia, at least,—than her folk tales and folk songs.

From the dawn of history, the human mind has always been profoundly influenced by the rhythmic properties of Nature. Through centuries and ages, man has been intuitively striving to adapt himself to that mysterious Force which moulds the universal order, and preordains the destinies of that which is and was and ever will be—a Force at once the cause and symbol of harmony itself. Of this subconscious, but ardent, yearning for rhythm and beauty, the song and tale are the most radiant expressions.

At times, it is not easy to draw a line between the fading murmurs of long forgotten legends and the dark beginnings of what purports to be history.

Like every other Wonderland, the Russian fairy world came into being through slow formation of successive layers recording the incessant changes in the beliefs, psychology, morality, official cults and occult visions of the Russian people. In Poushkin's own words:

> "That's Russia! That is Russian spirit!"

Ingenuous as it be, the folk tale is never a mere bagatelle; always there is some ancient story behind it, some moral expressive of a somberly suspected, though living truth. With full justification, then, Poushkin concluded his *Coq d'Or* with the saying that

> "Tales are dreams, and yet they tend
> To promote some useful end."

This is particularly so in the case of the story about the Fisherman and the Fish: the popular mind condemns greed and vanity as vices, of which the Fisherman's wife is a vivid emblem. The opening lines of the Tale are pervaded with a calm and epic atmosphere:

> "Once there lived an old man and old woman
> On the shore of a sea, blue and deep;
> There they lived in a humble old mud-hut,
> Fully thirty and three lonely years.
> The old man was engaged in his fishing,
> The old woman—in spinning her yarn.
> Once the man threw his net in the water,—
> Naught but seaweed the net did bring back;
> Then again he submergèd his fishnet,—
> Still with nothing but grass it came up.
> So he dipped his worn net for the third time,—
> And a gold fish was caught in the net,—
> Not a plain fish—the net brought a gold fish!
> And the little gold fish started praying,
> In a human voice making her plea:
> 'Throw me back in the sea, dear old fisher!
> For my freedom I'll pay a high price:
> I shall give thee whatever thou wishest!'
> The old man was astonished and frightened:
> Three and thirty long years he'd been fishing,

But had never heard sea-folk use speech.
So he threw the gold fish in the water,
With these words full of kindly intent:—
'May God bless thee, my dear little gold fish!
Me don't want to accept thy reward;
Do swim freely about in the water,
Do return to the sea, blue and deep.'

The old man then returned to his woman,
And about the great wonder he told her:
'Me today almost caught quite a fish!
Not a plain fish—my net brought a gold fish!
In our own human tongue she was speaking,
And she begged me to let her go home;
A high price did she offer for freedom,
Granting me any gift I might wish.
But me dared not to take any ransom;
So me let her return to the sea.'
The old woman then started to scold him:—
'Oh, ye fool! Silly goose-cap, thou art!
Not to take a reward from the fish!—
For a trough thou, at least, should have asked;
Look, our own has all fallen apart.' "

The old man then returned to the sea, and he called for the gold fish, telling her about his woman's desire:

"And thus spake the wee-fish to the fisher:
'Do not worry, old man! May God bless thee!—
Ye shall have the new trough that ye wish'th.' "

But *l'appetit vient en mangeant,* and the woman first insists on having a new cottage, then she is pictured as a social climber, and she says:

"Me don't want to be merely a peasant,
But a lady of noble degree."

This honor, when granted by the wonder fish, does not appease her ambition, and she sends her husband back to the sea, demanding that the fish make her Queen of the Land. Even to this plea, the gold fish accedes, and the woman is crowned Queen. Now she dwells in a sumptuous palace, surrounded by a brilliant guard. But boundless is the craze of the woman's vanity: she gives this order to her humble old husband:

" 'Do return to the fish, and salute her!
Me don't want to be merely a Queen!
But me wishes to rule over oceans,
And to dwell in the sea, blue and deep,
With the fish, my obedient servant,
To fulfill ev'ry one of my whims.'

"The old man did not dare to oppose her;
Not a word did he dare to respond.
So once more he went back to the blue sea:
A black tempest was raging in fury;
Angry waves in huge swells, wildly leaping,
Rolled in thunder and roarèd and groaned.
He began to call out for the gold fish,
So she answered his call, and she asked:
'Tell me what dost thou wish, dear old fisher?'
Thus responded the man with a bow:
'Me applies to thy mercy, wee queen fish!
What to do with that cursèd old woman!—
She no longer is pleased to be Queen,—
Over oceans she wants to rule now,

And she wishes to dwell in the waters,
With thyself, her obedient servant,
To fulfill ev'ry one of her whims.'
No response gave the fish to the fisher;
With her tail she but splashèd the water,
Off she went to the depths of the sea.
The old man waited long for an answer,
But in vain. Back he went to his woman.
Lo! What's that?—He beholds his old mud-hut;
At the threshold his woman is sitting,
And before her—the broken, old trough."

In the two other folk tales *(Coq d'Or* and *Czar Saltán),* Poushkin once more reverts to the half legendary motives which, in his youthful days, he had used in moulding *Ruslán and Ludmíla.* Permeated with incomparable humor, these precious creations of a mirthful genius may be conceived as a canon of the pure, colorful and free Russian popular speech, notwithstanding the fact that these tales are rhymed. Here Poushkin conquered the seemingly insurmountable difficulties of the syntax and the most intricate riddles of poetic meter. The superb narrative flows in these folk tales as easily and naturally as in his lyrical pieces—those songs, now glad and happy, now sad and mournful, of his palpitating heart.

The *Coq d'Or* requires no protracted exegetic comment. Everybody knows the story of Czar Dadón, whose Kingdom gay is guarded by the Golden Cock. And it will be probably recalled that the fairy bird was given to Dadón by a "eunuch and sky-reader." Summoned by the Czar, the sage appears before him, and we will let Poushkin tell his own story:

"In his bag he has in stock,—
Only think!—a golden cock!
'To achieve', he said, 'thy goal,
Place the bird on some high pole,
And my golden cock will be
Thy true guard o'er land and sea.

'Now, if peace and quiet reign,—
Silent will the bird remain;
But in case, from land or sea,
War again should threaten thee,
Or invasion should impend,
Or ill-fate distress should send,—
Instantly, to warn thine home,
Will the gold cock raise his comb,
Shake his wings and loudly crow,
Turning t'wards the threat'ning foe.'

"Czar Dadón, with joy untold,
Pledged the wizard heaps of gold.
'For such service, which I treasure,'
Czar Dadón exclaimed with pleasure,
'Thy first wish, as mine own will,
I shall readily fulfill.' "

The little Cock faithfully discharges his duties:

"Slight as may the danger seem,
The true guard, as in a dream,
Starts to move and shake his wings
Towards the side that danger brings,
And 'Kiri-koo-koó', he crows,
'Reign and peacefully repose!' "

But the Czar breaks his pledge when the eunuch comes to claim his reward: He refuses to surrender the beautiful Circassian Queen with whom, in the interim, he had fervently fallen in love. In a fit of anger Czar Dadón strikes the sky-reader on his head, and then comes the expiation scene, where the Cock avenges his dead master:

"He flies straightway to the car,
On the bald head of the Czar
He alights; he shakes his wings;
Pecks Dadón, and off he swings.
Czar Dadón fell down and sighed,
Gasped his last—and thus he died.
No one since that day has seen,
The Circassian fairy Queen."

By its freshness and sparkling youth, Poushkin's Tale has captured the imagination of the busy Western World; it has been translated by Rimsky-Korsakoff into a grand poem of enchanting sounds, while the Golden Cock, after having fulfilled the mission of wrathful, but just Fate—after having pecked Czar Dadón's bald head—has once more alighted on the high mast of Poushkin's fame.

Though less known, yet not less charming, is *The Tale About Czar Saltán,* which also inspired Rimsky to write an opera of the same name.

Like a piece of precious *point de Maligne,* the story is a classical and composite delineation of folk themes, borrowed from the chattering legends of the Russian fairy world. In an endless row, adventure after adventure unfolds itself in pictures full of ardor and joy. When reading *Czar Saltán,* one has the sensation of attending a splendid feast, where all is magic and wonder and color and sound—a glorious galaxy of animation, luster and shine.

The introductory scene is quite in line with the general tone, mirthful and light, of Poushkin's story:

"Three fair sisters, young and bright,
Near their window spun, one night;
One maid said:—'I truly mean,
If I only were a Queen,
For the people, dear and strange,
Gorgeous feasts I would arrange.'
'And if I Queen could be made,'
Said the second charming maid,
'For the whole world, I believe,
Linen I would gladly weave.'
'If a crown 'fore me be laid,'
Thus remarked the third young maid,
'For the Czar, with love and care,
I would bear a knightly heir.'
As she spake—and nothing more—
Gently creaked the wooden door,
And the Czar, from out the gloom,
Stepped into the maidens' room.
He had heard the last girl's pledge,
Standing hid behind the hedge.
Mighty glad he was to share
Girlish dreams about an heir.
'Gentle maiden, young and bright,
Be a Queen and bear a knight!—

To the heir, thou must remember,
I look forward in September.
As to you, my sisters dear,'
Said the Czar, 'you need not fear!—
Leave your home, and follow me
And your sister cheerfully:
Thou a weaver deft shall be,
And a cook I'll make of *thee.*' "

A rich feast is given in celebration of Czar Saltán's wedding, and Poushkin confidentially informs us:

"That same night, in ardor keen,
As she promised, the young Queen
Started to beget an heir."

Sadly, the brave Czar was soon forced to leave his young bride: a war broke out and, *volens-nolens,* he had to defend his Kingdom against the invading enemy. It must have been a protracted fight, since in September he was still far away from home, while, without waiting for his return, the Queen bore a sturdy son. This happy event, however, proved the beginning of many a misfortune. The envious sisters hastened to send to the King this libelous message:

"Thy Queen bore, as though for fun,
Neither daughter, neither son,
Neither frog, nor mouse in feature,
But a strange and awkward creature."

A few days later, the wicked maids produced a forged decree from the grieved Czar ordering that the Queen and her newborn be sealed in a barrel and tossed into the sea. Then comes this picture:

"In the blue sky stars are flashing;
In the blue sea waves are splashing;
In the dark sky clouds are shifting;
In the sea a cask is drifting.
In the cask the Queen is weeping;
In her arms the child is sleeping.
And the boy, in brawn and power
Gains and grows, from hour to hour.
Days go by. The Queen's despair
Is no less. But her young heir
Speeds the waves:—'Oh, restless wave!
Thou art free and thou art brave!
Splashest thou in mighty play,
Gloomy rocks thou wear'st away,
Strands thou overflow'st with roar,
And thou drivest ships ashore!
Do not wreak on us thy hate!
Land us safely! Save our fate!'
And the wave obeyed this plea:
So the cask, from out the sea,
She tossed gently on the strand,
And receded from the sand."

Now mother and son are safe on a fairy island. All sorts of wonders transpire there, while Gvidón, Saltán's son, becomes the happy ruler over that remote realm. Serene as his life is, he is sadly missing his father. Fate, in the guise of a beautiful Lady-Swan, favors the reunion of the family. Rumors about the Island of Bouyan have reached the Czar, and his interest is aroused by its variegated attractions. Among these, not the least is a darling little squirrel, busily engaged in an occupation which Poushkin describes so:

"Once more filled with hope and joy,
Homeward goes the happy boy.
As he steps into his yard,
Lo!—a pine tree, keeping guard,
Upright stands, and 'round folks gazing
At a squirrel. It's amazing:—
She cracks gold nuts; in her claws—
Em'rald kernels; little paws
File the shells in even heaps.
With a gentle whiz, she keeps
Softly singing this sweet air:—
'In the garden, maiden fair!'"

At last, the cherished day comes when Czar Saltán, escorted by a brilliant retinue, including the weaver and the cook, lands at the capital of Prince Gvidón. He is dazzled by the sight of its smiling gardens and golden domes. Now all wonders unroll before his eyes. A happy reunion this really was! And the Czar, overwhelmed by benevolence, promptly granted full amnesty to the weaver and the cook.

The tale would not have ended right without a sumptuous feast, after which

"Czar Saltán, in ravings sunk,
Fell asleep that night, half-drunk."

Poushkin adds that he happened to have been present at the revelry and that

"Mead and beer he drank and yet,
Naught but whiskers did he wet."

Such is *der langen Rede kurzer Sinn.*

XIV

La grammaire qui sait régenter jusqu'aux rois.

POUSHKIN, the Shakespeare of Russian poesy, must also be conceived as the Walter Scott of Russian prose; he conveyed to its grammatical build —classically simple as a Bach fugue—mathematical precision. He was the first to grasp the now generally acknowledged fact that prose, in order to be impressive, must follow certain well defined architectonic laws, which convey to the outline of the written word a musical flow or metrical touch. Accordingly, his are laconic, divided, as it were, in octosyllabic cola, and perfectly carved sentences, like those of which the Miniature Tragedies are composed.

In Poushkin's prose, the rule of verbal economy has been followed with unfailing, perhaps even rigid, logic. His style is a direct negation of rhetoric verbosity—not one superfluous word, not a single unwarranted punctuation mark: clear thoughts expressed in well-balanced and precise words. This standard of prose reminds one of a Doric column, that unfading symbol of simplicity and beauty.

Novelettes such as *The Undertaker, The Storm* and *The Shot,* unsurpassed in workmanship, have become models for that kind of fiction which is now known as *short stories.*

Applying to prose the principles of his own poetry, Poushkin achieved the maximum imaginative effect by the use of a minimum number of words. Take this passage from the poem *Poltava:*

"All calm is the Ukrain'an night.
The sky is clear. The stars shine bright.
The air, in drowsy meditation,
Is dormant. Gentle palpitation
In poplar leaves evokes a sound.
On White-Church, from its tranquil height,
The moon sheds beams of fairy light,
Illumining the gorg'ous park
And Hetman's castle, stern and dark.
And calm is everything around."

In a metrical text such as this, the demarcation line between poetry and prose seems to be altogether effaced: poetry merges with prose; prose assumes the guise of poetry. The construction of phrases is impossible of either improvement or change.

Such is, not the style, but the living canon, of the Poushkin prose; such we find it not only in his short stories, but equally in his longer novels: *The Captain's Daughter, Doubróvsky, The Egyptian Nights,* and *The Queen of Spades.* Each one of these stories is not only equal to, but, in sincerity of expression and purity of form, exceeds Lermontov's *The Hero of Our Times* or Tolstoy's *The Cossacks,* superb creations though these are.

Another excellent work in prose is Poushkin's *History of the Pougachév Rebellion,* which, in addition, is a brilliant historical account of a rather involved and obscure uprising of the Ural Cossacks which took place in the Eighteenth Century during the reign of Catherine the Great.

The impetuosity of the narrative, the chastity of the language, and what Mirsky calls, the "compact terseness" of the grammar in these exhibits of Russian literary taste and style, have hardly anything comparable in world literature.

By this time, the genius of Poushkin had fully blossomed out. His spirit soared to ever loftier planes of artistic achievement. From these heights, infinite distances revealed themselves to our poet's vision, and today, who will venture to suggest how far and how deep his inspired thought would have reached if fate had not mercilessly interrupted the majestic flow of his creative meditations?

XV

> *So gleams the past, the light of other days. . . .*
>
> BYRON

WHICH one of the great works of Poushkin should be considered the greatest?—This is largely a matter of opinion, since in our poet's artistic heritage there are so many perfect creations that it is, indeed, difficult to select among them any particular one in preference to others, equally ingenious and beautiful. Here we have to contend with a typical case of *embarras de choix*.

Still, it is undeniable that in *Eugene Onegin,* Poushkin has expressed himself more freely and more exhaustively than in any other of his major poems.

> *"Onegin"*—says Bielinsky—"is Poushkin's most intimate creation, the most beloved child of his fantasy, and there are but few works in which a poet's personality would be drawn out with such a completeness, so serenely and lucidly, as Poushkin's ego has been reflected in *Onegin.* Here is his whole life, his soul, his love; here—his sentiments, conceptions and ideals."

But *Eugene Onegin* is not a mere autobiographical account or an author's confession about the things he had dreamed in the days when he was young. In this work, Poushkin carved the characters out of the very flesh of Russian life, which he depicted so truthfully that he who wishes to comprehend Russia's past must begin with the study of *Eugene Onegin.* Here, we find unfolded a multi-colored picture of Russia's town and country, with a mass of living detail which, like sweet-scented flowers, are freely strewn all over the vast grounds of a virtuosic narrative outliving the wear and tear of fading time.

Like one of those Bartalozzi mezzotints, the general tone of this famous novel is graceful, humorous and light, here and there, touched in gold of the rising sun's first smiling beams, or tipped with silver of sighing sorrow—illusions and disillusions fused together, just as in everybody's experience, and just as smiles and sorrows were part of Poushkin's own life. For there is, in this work, a great deal of autobiographical material which the poet does not bashfully conceal from his audience even when he happens to reveal some trait of his intrinsic deviltry. Take these lines:

> "By Fate Eugene was safely guided:
> To *Mádame* first he was confided,
> And then *Monsieur* took care of him.
> The child was sweet, but full of whim.
> *Monsieur l'Abbé,* a humble Frenchman,
> In order not to tire the child,
> Instructed him in manner mild,
> Becoming his indulgent henchman.
> . . . .
> But when, in line with nature's fashion,
> Upon Eugene youth cast her grace—
> The age of hopes and tender passion—
> *Monsieur* was told to quit his place."

This certainly is suggestive of Poushkin's own childhood.

In the history of Russia's intellectual development, *Eugene Onegin* became a landmark of major moment. As Professor Kluchevsky said:

> "This was an event of our youth; a biographical trait of ours; a break in our growth similar to that which is occasioned by college graduation or the first love."

Poushkin devoted at least eight years of his life to the moulding and remoulding of *Eugene Onegin,* which is a novel of eight chapters in verse and rhyme. In the days when the work was originally conceived, Poushkin was still living through his Byronic period, and Byron's impress upon the character of Eugene is quite obvious. But here, again, Poushkin succeeded in preserving his independence of an artist, and the complex type of Onegin himself comprises many psychological ingredients and historical antecedents, all of which stand in no relation to the Byronic philosophy.

Nor was Poushkin at all sure as to which anthropological class his hero really belonged. Half-seriously he asked these questions:

"What is he then?—An imitation?
A worthless phantom?—Or perhaps,
Just one of Moscow's many chaps
In Harold's guise?—Or a translation
Of other people's whims and moods?"
. . . .

No doubt, Childe Harold's mantle was an important feature in Onegin's attire. But there is a long genealogical history behind Onegin—a past evolution which dates back to the early part of the Eighteenth Century: the fathers of the Russian Onegins began their studies under Elizabeth; they completed their education under Catherine, and leisurely slumbered through their senescence under Alexander. This genetic background constitutes a peculiar mixture of Peter's stern traditions, Voltaire's skepticism, the grand covenants of Racine, and the petty vices of a wealthy aristocracy which bred on *dolce far niente* and was nourished by gaunt serfdom.

Nor is there any question that in his descending lineage Onegin was the forefather of a whole company of wanton heroes, such as Lermontov's Pechórin, Goncharóv's Raisky, Turgenev's Roudin and Lavretzky, Dostoievsky's Raskolnikov, and so many others. In this or that sense, in one measure or another, they are all afflicted with a marked inferiority complex, which has been fitly stated in the well-known sentence:

> "We are born for daring impulsions,
> But achievement—is not our realm."

Polished and smart, but superficial and carefree, Onegin is a legitimate son of Russian nobility as it used to be in those remote days. A child "of luxury and play", the "eighteen year old philosopher" began to burn the candle of his life at an age when he should have been diligently attending school, and he grew fatigued even before he had done anything to be tired of.

The scope of Onegin's education was neither too extensive nor too profound. But he did, from his early youth, master "the science of tender passion", and all the subtle little tricks of deceiving and intriguing the fair sex, now by passionate declarations, and now, by pensively eloquent silence. A habitué of the ballet, Eugene grew fond of that half-veiled life "behind the scenes", those theatrical *dessous,* which are artfully concealed from the eyes of the uninitiated.

The radical commentators of the Sixties' accused Poushkin of having almost glorified in Onegin the model of a socially useless creature. But they seem to have overlooked the fact that Poushkin himself, when portraying his hero, entertained no illusions concerning the actual meaning of his moral character. Obviously, it was for this reason that he selected as an epigraph to the opening chapter of the novel this citation from a private letter:

> "Absorbed by vanity, he also possessed that kind of arrogance which made him view with equal indifference the bad things as well as the good—an attitude which was due to a feeling of superiority, imaginary perhaps."

Poushkin clearly understood that, by introducing Onegin to his readers, he was giving a vivid picture of those idle strata of Russian, or if you please, European society, whose existence was an incarnation of nothingness, and whose would-be disappointments—or to use the then fashionable term—whose "spleen", was the natural outgrowth of incurable indolence and lack of mental culture. Onegin's main trouble is that he has no aim in life, and he drifts along from day to day, according to Ruskin, "without fear, without pleasure, without horror, and without pity."

This vacuity of the spirit prompts him to give vent to hopeless lamentations:

"Oh why, like Tula's poor taxator,
Am I not lying paralyzed?
Why am I not, at least, chastised
By rheumatism?! . . . Oh Creator!
. . . .
The ill are happy: They can figure
That o'er them hangs Fate's heavy glaive,
But I am young and full of vigor!
I'm bored, and craving for the grave!"

Fate interrupts the monotonous diversity of Onegin's social adventures on the Neva banks, and chance transplants him to his estate where he begins to dwell in dull seclusion. But soon he meets Lensky, a young poet, an admirer of Schiller and an adept of Goettingen's devious ideals. Between the two a friendship develops and, for a while, both seem pleased with each other.

Through Lensky, and on his insistence, Onegin makes the acquaintance of the Larins, an old-fashioned, simple, but hospitable family, in whose bosom there grow two lovely field flowers, two fair sisters—Olga and Tatiana.

Of Olga Poushkin gives this picture:

> "She, ever modest, bashful seeming,
> And always bright as sun at morn;
> As naïve as a poet's dreaming,
> And sweet, as when love's kiss is born;
> Her eyes as deep as heaven's blue;
> Her smiles, her locks of golden hue;
> Her maiden stature, voice and glance,—
> All that is Olga:—Choose by chance
> Some novel cheap, her portrait's there;
> 'Tis very pleasing; I admit
> I once was quite in love with it.
> But now its sight I cannot bear."

But Lensky *is* in love with Olga. They are even engaged, and soon the link of two loving hearts will be made stronger—who knows?—by the nuptial tie. Though charming, Olga is a *terre à terre* creature. Her feelings are shallow, light her moods, and, inconsequentially, she flits about like an iridescent butterfly.

How different Tatiana!—Timid as a doe in dreamy woods, she has never taken any fancy to the vivacious games of her youthful companions. She prefers pensive solitude, and even within the fold of her own family she seems a stranger.

> "But pensiveness, her true attendant,
> From tender days of cradle age,

In hours of leisure, bright and splendent,
Dream feasts for her did often stage."

Always meditating over something, always sorrowful and wistful, Poushkin tells us about Tatiana that

". . . her tender little fingers
Despise the needle, as she lingers
O'er silken patterns all aflame,
And drowsy linen on the frame."

Since childhood, Tatiana has had an almost mystical adoration of Nature. Fond of her silent park and the golden fields around,

"She loved to watch the morn's slow wading,
Awaiting dawn's first smiling glance,
When from the sky line, pale and fading,
Stars disappear in choral dance."

As she grew older, Tatiana, just as Poushkin himself, contracted the delightful but somewhat dangerous habit of reading—a tendency which, in her case, could be hardly conceived as congenital, since

"She always had a strong addiction
To reading novels, soft and stern,
She was in love with dreams, with fiction,
Rousseau and Richardson, in turn;
Her father, not a social climber,
Was just a simple good old-timer,
And while in books he saw no wrong,—
For reading his distaste was strong."

Then comes the romance, an immortal *page d'amour* of a maiden's heart.

"Elle était fille, elle était amoureuse."—Desperately Tatiana falls in love with Onegin, and after much fear and hesitation, she writes him a letter full of sentimental emotion. She knows that she is breaking all conventions, and she even starts her confession with a pathetic self-indictment:

"I write to you! Is more required?
Can lower depths beyond remain?—
'Tis in your power, if desired,
To crush me with a just disdain." *

Alas! Her love evokes no echo in Onegin's sophisticated heart, and in a chilly sermon, he tells her:

"I love you with a love of brother,
Still stronger is my love, maybe."

He confesses that "he is not created for beatitude", nor adapted to the delights of domesticity. He wants to be free, and freedom—he argues—is incompatible with nuptial shackles.

Heartbroken, Tatiana listens to Onegin's lesson. She firmly knows that, having once given her heart to Onegin, she will never love again:

---

* These lines are quoted from Lieutenant Colonel Spalding's translation of Tatiana's letter.

"Das giebt's nur einmal!
Das kommt nicht wieder. . . ."

Deep is her wound, and it will never quite heal. For Tatiana's heart is not governed by fleeting caprice or transient whims. Tatiana is a Russian woman whose heart, though soft and yielding, is firm and faithful; to her, self-sacrifice is not a pose or mood, but rather an irresistible response to love and duty. Tatiana is that captivating symbol of Russian womanhood which found its further interpretation in other dear images—in Turgenev's Lisa, Tolstoy's Natásha, Goncharóv's Vera, and Dostoievsky's Sonya. They all are victims of love, and of what they conceive to be their duty. Theirs is proud and concentric suffering; theirs is pain caused by eccentric circumstances, desecrating the "holy of holies" of their loyal hearts.

Onegin's and Tatiana's paths seem to be parting forever: *He* leaves her—still "absorbed by vanity", still wearing Childe Harold's moody mantle, with a mind perhaps more arid than ever, after his duel with Lensky, whom he so cruelly insulted and so wantonly killed; *She* is left by him—with a bleeding, but loving heart, determined to forget, ready to forgive, with a firm resolve to fulfill her duty, trying though it be.

In the ever-flowing tides of Time, as Heraclitus used to call it—"in the ceaseless flux of changes"—events appear and disappear, but life rolls its waves just the same.

A few years after Onegin's departure, Tatiana, acceding to the entreaties of her family, marries a brilliant General of high standing. Now, admitted to the Imperial Court, Tatiana shines as the brightest star in the aristocratic constellation of the Northern capital. And it so happens that Onegin, who, for years, has heard nothing about her who chose him for the hero of her dreams, returns to St. Petersburg after having wandered long and uselessly throughout Russia. Again, he is attracted by the luster and shine of social life; again, he divides his time between one ball and the next, while, *entre poire et fromage,* again, he feels ready to resume his amorous career.

Yet, Fate rules differently: At one of the social affairs, he sees a woman: She is "all harmony, all wonder." Surrounded by an admiring crowd and flattered by those who themselves are used to nothing but flattery, she displays her grace with divine indifference and calm. Onegin is thrilled, and he learns that this is Tatiana. Now he begins to worship her, whom in days past, he had treated as a *quantité négligeable.* Now he is in love, but

"Not with that girl so shy and bashful,
So poor, and simple, and in love,
But with a princess unaffected,
A goddess, perfect and selected,
Of the majestic Neva shores."

Onegin's passion for Tatiana leaps and bounds. But she remains indifferent, cold and deaf. He writes her letter after letter, tender, flaming, apologetic. He confesses:

"Once having met you, by mere fortune,
Your love I marked. To my misfortune,
Take heed of it I did not dare.
That feeling then I have arrested;
My freedom, worthless and detested,
To lose, alas! I did not care."

His letters are ignored. The tortures of unreturned love grow so acute that he retires from society, and lives in solitude through the slow-creeping Winter. He fears he is going mad, but Poushkin, with his usual sense of humor, remarks that

". . . how it happ'd he did not know it:
Long winter months began to wane,
Yet he did not become a poet,
Nor did he die nor grow insane."

Now Onegin makes his last effort to win Tatiana's affection: Once more he sees her, and kneeling before her, he eloquently tells her of his love and sufferings and dreadful regrets about the fatal error which, years ago, when he first met her, he had so carelessly committed.

Sadly and silently, Tatiana listens to this impassioned confession. Then she renders her final verdict. But how different is her rebuttal from that of Onegin's first lecture on a maiden's ethics! Hers are words permeated with sighs of a wounded heart:

"Enough! Arise. I feel I must
Reveal my thoughts for this may lessen
Your pain. You will recall the day,
When in the park, by fate's strange way,
Together we were brought. Your lesson
I then, alas! was doomed to learn.
And yet, today, it is my turn.
Onegin, then I was so youthful,
And better then I was, maybe.
I lovèd you, and I was truthful,
But in your heart—what did I see?
What was its answer?—Condemnation:
A maiden's humble fascination,
Her love, to you, were far from new."

And then Tatiana asks Onegin what petty whim had brought him to her feet: She suspects that he is more fascinated by the brilliant setting, in which he found her, than by anything that is truly part of her own self. To Tatiana the tinsel of her weary life, the frippery of the fatiguing masquerade are of no value or attraction. If it were only possible, she would gladly abandon all the splendor of her gleaming life

"For silent bookshelves, dreamy parks,
And our humble rural dwelling."

She tells Onegin that she still loves him, but having once pledged her loyalty to another, she must and will forever remain true to him.

Abruptly Poushkin draws the curtain, but before leaving his heroes to their fate, he heaves a sigh of regret, sounding a lamenting note on that which to himself was dear and yet had vanished, like a dream, into the all-engulfing Nirvana of the past:

"But they to whom, at gath'rings gay,
The early strophes I have read. . . .
These are no more, those—far away,
As Sádi once so aptly said.
Without them was Onegin moulded.
And thou, who hast to me unfolded
Tatiana's beautiful ideal. . . .
Yes, much did fate relentless steal! . . .
Ah, happy he who early goes
And leaves the feast of life divine,
Who does not drain its cup of wine,
Nor read its novel to the close,
And swiftly parts with it, as I
To my Onegin bade goodbye."

XVI

Ainsi toujours poussés vers de nouveaux rivages. . . .
LAMARTINE

But him, as one's first ardent love,
The heart of Russia can't forget.
TUTCHEV

Fare thee well, and if for ever,
Still for ever fare thee well. . . .
BYRON

EARLY in 1831, Poushkin married Natalie Goncharóva, a young girl of unusual beauty, but with a mind both shallow and uncultured.

That marriage proved unhappy.

Above all, Natalie loved distraction, lavish and gleaming entertainments at which she could be displaying her scintillating smiles to an ever-growing crowd of her admirers and wooers.

With Madonna's features, but deprived by Nature of Madonna's soul, she sadly failed to create in her home that atmosphere of loving care and gentle tenderness, for which Poushkin so intensely longed and which would have given him that inner peace, that comfort which he knew not in his earlier days when, "by stormy passion driven forth", he was swept from one amorous adventure to another.

Natalie had no understanding and no appreciation of the radiant genius of her husband. Nor did she spare his self-respect and honor, which, to Poushkin, were man's most treasured gifts and most inviolable possessions.

Empty gossip, like a dark shadow, followed Poushkin and Natalie throughout their married life, and evil tongues, sneeringly, began to speak of him as the *"Mari de Madame"*.

In 1836, Baron Haeckern-Dantes, a handsome Guardsman of alien extraction, started courting Natalie. Their romance developed into a social scandal, which soon became the theme of endless idle talk. For a time, Poushkin sought to conceal the wound of his heart from the curious eyes of a meddlesome world. He kept silent. But heavy clouds were menacingly gathering over his lucid brow.

On October nineteen of that same year, the day of the Lyceum's traditional celebration, Poushkin attended the feast for which he had composed a touching poem. When his turn came, and the toastmaster called on him, he rose from his seat and, with a sense of deep affection, started reading:

"There was a time: Our youthful celebration,
With roses crowned, was all delight and shine;
Songs mixed with clinks of glasses full of wine,
And close we sat, replete with animation.
Our souls were then so ignorant, so free!
We lived with ease, with more undaunted venture,
The health of hope we then drank merrily,—
The health of youth, its joys and its adventure."

But Time, youth's cruel rival, had shattered many a hope and left deep furrows in Poushkin's burning heart. Again, as in *Onegin,* the poet could have exclaimed:

"Yes, much did Fate relentless steal!"

But he read on, and with every new strophe, his emotion grew more intense, and suddenly, as though foreboding the approaching catastrophe, overcome with sorrow, he burst into tears. . . . His song divine remained unsung forever.

Meanwhile, the behavior of Dantes grew ever more insulting, and on January 26, 1837, Poushkin sent to him his challenge. Next day, the duel did take place, and Dantes fatally wounded the noble bard:

"An empty heart does beat exactly,—
The pistol shakes not in the hand."

Helpless and bleeding, Poushkin fell in the snow with the words: *"Je suis blessé!"* Dantes made a move toward him, but the poet impatiently commanded: *"Ne bougez pas! Je me sens encore assez fort pour tirer mon coup."* * Then, leaning forward, and aiming the pistol at his rival, he fired that shot, slightly wounding him who impiously trampled the laurel crown of Russia's greatest genius.

Poushkin was immediately placed in a sledge and taken home. Though experiencing sharp pains, and every few minutes losing consciousness, he joked with his second. Invincible serenity did not leave Poushkin even when he was being driven to his deathbed.

Not long before the final agony, he cast a look at his bookshelves and murmured:

"Farewell, my friends. . . ."

Only an hour later Poushkin's end came.—This was the beginning of his immortality.

---

* "Don't move! I feel strong enough to fire my shot!"

GOGOL

GOGOL

March 20, 1809–February 21, 1852

(Psychological Sketch)

A DESCENDANT of noble parentage, Nicholas V. Gogol was born on March 20, 1809, in the province of Poltava, Little Russia. In 1821, he matriculated in the Nejin High School. In 1825, Gogol's father died. In 1828, Gogol graduated at the High School and undertook his first journey to St. Petersburg. In 1831, he started teaching in a woman's college in St. Petersburg; there, he established close contacts with the leading Russian literary circles. During that year he published the First Part of *The Evenings in a Village near Dikánka*. The Second Part of the same Collection appeared in 1832. In 1834, Gogol was appointed Assistant Professor of World History at the St. Petersburg Imperial University. During that same year he completed his two comedies, *The Reviser* and *The Wedding*. In 1835, he started writing *The Dead Souls*. On April 19, 1836, *The Reviser* was given for the first time on the Imperial dramatic stage at St. Petersburg. On January 29, 1837, Poushkin died, an event which proved the greatest misfortune in Gogol's life. From 1837 to 1839, Gogol spent most of his time in Rome. In 1840, he completed two comedies: *The Litigation* and *The Servants' Room*. During the same year, he finished a romantic novel, *Tarás Búlba,* and also *The Cloak,* one of his best short stories. In 1842, the First Part of *The Dead Souls* was printed. In 1845, Gogol burned the manuscript of the Second Part of *The Dead Souls.* In 1846, *The Selected Portions from the Correspondence with Friends* were printed in St. Petersburg. Early in 1848, Gogol undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and on May 16th of the same year he returned to Russia. On February 11, 1852, Gogol again burned the Second Part of *The Dead Souls,* together with most of his other manuscripts. On February 21, 1852, Gogol died in Moscow.

I

Alas! Poor Yorick! . . .
SHAKESPEARE

A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain. . . .
From the Inscription on Shelley's
Monument at Oxford College.

What is to be done if such is the nature of the author who, having fallen ill of his own imperfections, is no longer capable of painting anything but misery . . . and imperfections of our life! . . .
GOGOL—*The Dead Souls.*

IT IS not generally known that Gogol, the genius of satire, the Molière of Russian comedy and the author of classically mirthful stories, is perhaps the most tragic figure in world literature.

The source of Gogol's inner drama appears to have been purely psycho-genetic in the sense that the painful discord, which ruined his brain and poisoned his soul, was the outgrowth of his own mind's queer fermentation, for there was nothing in his whole biography—at least nothing organically discernible or objectively real—that should have given birth to pessimism as desperate and affliction as sharp as those which finally drove him into the impasse of chronic morbidity, if not insanity itself.

Etiologically, this condition can be traced to the crystallization in Gogol's consciousness of one fixed idea, one obsessional thought, about the Devil, which, in turn, may be regarded as a pathological exhibition of a deeply rooted religious complex.

In the ideational content of Gogol's mind the sinister concept of Satan assumed a part that was not merely conspicuous but, in fact, all-absorbing. Of course, this mental imbalance did not mature at once; the history of its growth was gradual and slow, but there came a time when Gogol, the artist, was simply overwhelmed by Gogol, the religious fanatic.

Religion has exercised a dominant influence upon Gogol ever since his childhood. In 1825, when he was only sixteen, his father died. This was the first irreparable loss which Gogol had suffered. He was then attending a private school, away from his home town, and this is what he wrote his mother:

> "Do not worry, Mother dear! I have endured this blow with genuinely Christian courage. Indeed, at first, I was terribly shocked. . . . Having been left alone, I gave way to the full depth of mad despair. I even had the impulse to commit suicide, but God prevented me from this. . . . Oh, sacred faith, thou shalt be blest! . . . Only in thee I find a source of consolation and assuagement of my sorrow."

In a subsequent note, also addressed to his mother, Gogol expressed a significant, and even prophetic thought:

> ". . . . Why should one try to lift the dreadful curtain of the future?—Possibly it has in store for us serenity and sweet joys, clear evenings and peaceful family life. Let us trust in the Almighty, in whose hand our fate rests. As to myself, I will pursue my course in this world, and if it should prove different from that which is predestined for the average man, at least I shall try to do my best."

Here we have, in embryo, the life philosophy of Gogol: his boundless faith in Divine Providence, his humility, and the vivid realization of a moral responsibility conferred upon him.

> "Since my earliest days",—writes Gogol at the age of eighteen—"when I was still almost unconscious, I have been burning with inextinguishable zeal to be of some benefit to my country, and I was longing to render it service of any kind, slight though it be. The disturbing notion that I should prove powerless, that my road may be barred, that I might be deprived of the chance to be useful to my native land, even in the smallest way, —plunged me into profound dismay."

And so, during his whole life, Gogol always sought to evaluate his own writings by the utilitarian gauge of the morally useful which, in his judgment, was equivalent to strict observance of the dictates of Christ. With time, the feeling of variance between the pure Christian ideal and his personal outlook, as reflected in his work, grew increasingly more acute and disturbing.

However, in his early days, Gogol was serene and happy; his psychology was marked with genuine humor, if the term be taken in Thackeray's sense as "a mixture of love and wit".

Gogol did love Nature—the endless steppes of Russia, her grand rivers, dreamy forests and silver lakes; the soft stillness of her golden fields, the sweet fragrance of the Ukrainian cherry orchards, slumbering in the shadows of a tranquil summer night.

Repeating Byron's words, Gogol could have said about himself:

"I love not man the less, but Nature more."

His approach to Mother Earth in that early period of his life, was open-hearted and unsophisticated. In this he emulated the great example set by Poushkin, whose poetic philosophy is faithfully expressed in A. Maikov's classical *Octave*.

"The harmony of verse, its mysteries divine,—
Do not attempt to solve by reading learned books:
Alone, when wandering with no conceived design,
Seek earnestly to grasp the sense of what the brooks
And woods are murmuring; try also to combine
These sounds in that inspired heart of thine.

Then, of their own accord, like whispers of the
pines,
Sonorous octaves will emerge in cadenced lines."

This profound penetration into the soul itself of Nature has made Gogol the Ruysdael of Russian prose, and has enabled him to paint a whole range of delightful Russian landscapes, classical word pictures, which, in days past, like Poushkin's rhymes, Krilov's fables, or Our Lord's Prayer, had to be learned by heart on school benches by every Russian child.

But Gogol was also endowed with an innate talent for sensing the incongruous or comic side of life. As though instinctively, he felt that, in human intercourse, along with the earnest and solemn things, there is much of a distinctly humorous and amusing character—an element of laughter amidst the streams of tears.

Gogol's youthful trends were akin to those of a Terence or a Plautus—those forerunners of the jovial *atellanae fabulae,* with their brilliant dialogues, vivid popular speech and witty puns.

He was all fun and jest in his early stories, in his *Evenings in a Village near Dikánka,* a book which appeared in 1832. These light water color sketches of Ukrainian peasant life contain many a cadenced chord of lyricism, and also unmistakable signs of a keen knowledge of human nature, quite remarkable in so young a writer.

There is nothing, in these novelettes, that is either spectacular or high sounding, most of them dealing with rather trivial happenings and trifling every-day events. Gogol minutely, almost pedantically, describes the mediocre man in his customary surroundings of provincial vegetation; his queerness makes him laugh, but the comic vein, while strong and sparkling—particularly where the author dwells upon the theme of triviality—is strangely interwoven with something that makes one sigh.

With even stronger emphasis is the drama of banality developed in Gogol's later works, among which the story of Akáki Akákievich in *The Cloak* is perhaps the most pathetic.

The hero of that tale is a tiny little wheel in the gigantic mechanism of a bureaucratic State. He is only a petty scribe, of whom Gogol gives us this vivid portrait:

> "A government clerk was serving in one of the Departments, a clerk who, to be sure, was not too remarkable. He was short, somewhat pockmarked, somewhat carroty, conveying the impression of being even a bit sightless; he had a little bald spot on his forehead, and wrinkles on both cheeks, while his face had a hemorrhoidal tinge. . . . What is to be done?!—For this the Petersburg climate is to be blamed."

Akáki Akákievich was respected by no one and was afraid of everybody. From early morning to late in the evening, day by day, year after year, he has been diligently, in monotonous succession, copying official papers of some kind. His whole life was in his routine occupation, and the four walls of the chancery in which he sat scribbling, formed the natural boundaries of that world where he moved in an almost motionless tempo. He had neither enemies nor friends, neither ambitions nor desires. Like an automaton, he performed his daily functions, with no hope for a brighter future, with no regrets about his empty past.

Still, much as everybody else, even Akáki Akákievich had to claim his farthing in the enchanted Principality of Utopia. And so he started dreaming about a new cloak which, perhaps, some day, he might manage to order for himself—a lovely new coat with a cat fur collar and calico lining. After long months of weary waiting, heroic struggling and painful saving, the happy day came, when the tailor across the street triumphantly delivered the new cloak to Akáki Akákievich. For once a glorious dream had come true. Now Akáki Akákievich could make his first appearance in the brightly lighted streets of the capital and, surely, his new mantle would be noticed everywhere and admired by everybody. So, one evening our hero put on his cloak and went to a party. It was quite late when he was making his way home through the deserted avenues and squares of St. Petersburg. Suddenly, a rude voice behind him shouted: *"The cloak is* *mine"*, and, with these horrible words, somebody roughly grabbed him by his collar. In an instant, Akáki Akákievich was helplessly lying in the snow. When he finally got up on his feet, the cloak had vanished forever. The end of the cloak proved the end of poor Akáki Akákievich himself. He died in delirium, but strangely, life in St. Petersburg went on in endless motion just as heretofore.

Here, again, a light and mirthful story terminates in a mournful, and even tragic, dénouement. Is this not because experience teaches us the sad lesson that our earthly existence, after all, is not so amusing as it may, at times, appear?—Speaking of this aspect in Gogol's writings, Bielinsky observed:

> "Now, take virtually every one of Gogol's stories: What is their distinguishing mark?—What does every one of his novels express?—An hilarious comedy which begins with nonsense and winds up in tears; a comedy which . . . we call 'Life'. Such are all his sketches: At first, they sound funny, but later, they grow sad. Such is also our life: At first, it seems funny, and then—sad. Surely, in this there is much poesy, much philosophy, and much truth."

Gogol's realism, it will be noted, is more a literary method than a psychological attitude; he is faithfully recording facts and situations as they appear on the vast screen of life, but he does more: he seeks to explain what these facts actually mean. To the objective content of what logic learnedly denotes as perception, he always adds the subjective element of evaluation, and the connection which thus arises between the microcosm of his consciousness and the macrocosm of reality, far from being formal only, now expresses some signal social principle, and now hints at some solemn moral truth.

II

FROM the happy Spring days of his literary career, Gogol, as already mentioned, has invariably taken a sympathetic, at times, even tender, attitude towards the little fellow, the forlorn creature, whose existence seems to be absorbed and hopelessly dissolved in the caustic acids of social life. He had always felt that, much as the routine history of man is a trivial, and therefore, slightly comic affair,—because of this, it is neither less momentous nor more jolly to him who, like Akáki Akákievich, is incurably little and desperately humble.

The commonplace, as yet, does not reveal itself too noticeably in *The Evenings in a Village near Dikánka,* merely creeping out, here and there, as a casual suggestion, while the real emphasis still rests upon the merry side of life. But even in this early Collection, Satan, who will later be conceived as the eternal emblem of vulgar mediocrity, does make his appearance in the charming story *Christ-*

mas Eve Night. Here, the Enemy of Mankind assumes the innocent guise of a naughty little devilkin, with a pair of horns so small that they are even less conspicuous than those scarcely discernible on Michelangelo's grandiose marble statue of Moses.

Now, Gogol's Devil being in a wicked mood, steals the Moon from the sky, and at once the world is plunged into black obscurity. He resorts to this mean trick because he is jealous of Oksana, a lovely brunette, with whom Vakula, the blacksmith, is madly infatuated, and to whom she is somewhat responsive. The Devil cleverly argues that if the night be suddenly made ink dark, Oksana's father, who has been invited to a wet Christmas Eve party at the Sexton's, will probably decide to stay home. This would prevent Vakula from keeping his rendezvous with the girl.

Of course, the whole plot is only an innocuous jest. Still, it is significant that the Devil becomes the *causa causarum* of all ensuing mischief. Happily, "all's well that ends well": Vakula manages to outwit the Devil; Oksana marries Vakula, and the blacksmith, who also enjoys the enviable reputation of being the village Raphael, in commemoration of his triumph over the little horned imp, and *ad majorem Dei gloriam,* paints on the church wall a picture—a masterpiece, indeed,—which even wins the authoritative approbation of the local bishop—showing the Devil in Hell, completely ridiculed and utterly disgraced.

III

INFINITE distance separates the biblical conception of Satan and its subsequent interpretations in world literature, from that of Gogol's, as it finally developed in his somber metaphysical visions. Gradually, his early notion of the Devil as the genetic source of harmless naughtiness was supplanted by a more hopeless conviction that the Evil Genius is the living expression of everything that is mean and loathsome, insignificant and amorphous, deceitful and trivial in the extreme.

Gogol's Devil merrily walks in the very midst of human crowds, inconspicuous and unnoticed, wearing a derby like the rest, and displaying an air of innocence like most of us do. What a contrast to Dante's Lucifer—the grim Sovereign of perpetual Darkness, the Father of all Sin, the awe-inspiring Potentate of the Damned Inferno; or to Milton's Serpent—"confounded though immortal", "the Rebel Angel against the Throne and Monarchy of God"!—Nor is Gogol's Devil of quite the same order as Goethe's Mephisto—the cynical seducer, the empty skeptic, sowing a seed of doubt wherever he perceives a trunk of faith, and undermining every effort of the spirit to lift itself above the platitudes of dull reality.

Again, where is the genealogic link between Gogol's Devil and Byron's Satan, with his proud motto: "We are mighty", or even Lermontov's Demon—another synthesis of Evil, but one translated into the form of everlasting Beauty?

Or what affinity is there between Gogol's trivial, but *comme il faut* devilkin and Baudelaire's bloody Vampire "without pity",—that insatiable tormentor, whose weakling victims, in a state of masochistic ecstasy, mutter the insane prayer: "Oh, belovèd Beelzebub, we do adore thee!" *

Poushkin's lucid genius, as though instinctively, evaded the sinister dæmonic theme; on rare occasions only his imagination would be disturbed by the "strange vision of two idols", one—the youthful Delphian God, the God of wrath and boundless pride; the other, like Leonardo's Bacchus,—a demon at once deceitful and enchanting—an "effeminate, voluptuous, dubious and false ideal".

Among all writers, Dostoievsky's Devil perhaps comes closest to that of Gogol's: The great clairvoyant of the human soul refused to conceive in the sinister ghost anything either clever or impressive; his is a good-natured and gregarious sort of creature, who loves to mix with the rank and file, and who just longs to take on the appearance of man; in fact, it is his cherished hope that the day will come when he may be peacefully dwelling on this three-dimensional earthly plane of ours without worry about any four-dimensional future. The impulse of rebellion, so emphatic in the biblical Serpent, seems to have been altogether effaced in Dostoievsky's demon, and were it not for his ignoble tactics with regard to the human race, he would have been just an ordinary Devil "with a long and smooth tail like that of a Great Dane."

---

* Compare Baudelaire's poems *Le Vampire* and *Sed Non Satiata.*

Of course, Gogol was fully awake to the fact that Evil may, and does, assume multiform and confusing aspects, ranging from open defiance of the Maker of all things to the faintest manifestations of artifice and envy. But in his judgment the gigantic shadow of the apocalyptical Beast is so menacing and obvious that no one can be either attracted or deceived by a symbol as hideous and grim. And even when such a dire Titan, by wielding his superhuman powers, drives man into the den of vice, the sin so committed will always be forgiven by Him Who is the source of boundless Mercy.

It is for this reason that we find in Gogol's masks of the Devil no trace which would divulge the hidden substance of intrinsic wickedness.

By making the Fiend an average resultant of every form of mediocrity and every mode of meanness, Gogol has given birth to a dangerous idea that the Tempter is within us, and that every one, at least potentially, is a germ carrier of the dæmonic disease.

IV

THE light and humorous Dikánka stories placed Gogol on the Russian literary map. His second book, *Mírgorod* (Peaceville), assured to him the title of a classic. The new Collection comprised four novels: *Old-Fashioned Land Owners, Tarás Búlba, Viy* and *The Story of How Iván Ivánovich Quarrelled with Iván Nikíforovich.*

No one before, not even Poushkin, had ever used prose as elegant and a tongue as colorful as those in which *Mírgorod* was written. Above all, *Tarás Búlba* evoked stormy applause, both among the critics and the public. Sheviriév, himself a writer of genuine literary taste, dedicated to this new work of fiction a penetrating critical study.* He spoke with high praise of Gogol's style, its simplicity and charm, but he also attributed to the young author the "wonderful gift of grasping the irrational element in man's life, and converting it into incomparable poesy of laughter."

Tarás Búlba deviates from the general trend of Gogol's writings in that it deals with a romantic subject—that heroic stage in the history of the free Cossack communities, when they were engaged in their epic struggle against Poland, a country which, in the Seventeenth Century gravely menaced Ukrainia's independence.

Yet, in the *Old-Fashioned Land Owners* and the comic story about Iván Ivánovich and Iván Nikíforovich, the theme of triviality assumes the significance of a Wagnerian leitmotiv: it penetrates all the pores and fibers of yawning provincialism; it dominates the thoughts and actions of those who are drawn into its mud, and just as oxygen or nitrogen,—it is part of its boring atmosphere.

---

* *The Moscow Observer,* March, 1835.

Gogol was greatly encouraged by the reception of his *Mírgorod,* but he was not at all sure that novels of the merely entertaining type should be regarded by him as the ultimate goal and crowning aim of his own literary endeavors. From a purely artistic standpoint, he experienced an irresistible urge to turn to the dialogue of which he later proved a peerless master.

But aside from aesthetics, there was this ethical problem: laughter, his principal weapon, could hardly be treated as an end in itself; it had to contain a distinct teleological element or a constructive ethical stimulus, and he knew of no loftier purpose in the artist's creative work than that which fosters moral betterment of man.

It was with this thought in mind that he undertook the writing of his *Reviser,* a five-act comedy which has made his name immortal.

The plot of the play is quite simple: Khlestakov, the hero, a petty member of the administrative flock serving in one of the countless St. Petersburg chanceries, on his way to his native village, happens to stop in a small and God-forsaken provincial town; it is governed in a good old patriarchal fashion by Antón Antónovich Skvozník-Dmukhanóvsky—a hard-boiled and utterly dishonest bailiff—in touching union with a score of equally unscrupulous state functionaries, each one of them having at least some little trespass on his conscience.

Having lost en route all his money in a card game, Khlestakov finds himself stranded and penniless. Unfortunately—and this is only natural—our hero has to have his daily bread, but the inconsiderate innkeeper rudely refuses to extend credit to both him and his manservant, Ossip. Meanwhile, Antón Antónovich, through a private letter, has just received confidential word that a reviser, charged with an important secret mission, is about to start from the capital, and that he will inspect all official records under Dmukhanóvsky's enlightened jurisdiction.

The queer behavior of Khlestakov; the mysterious purpose that should have brought him to a town which no one would have reason to visit anyway, and more convincing still, the fact that he was stubbornly declining to settle for his room and board,—all this combined, to the provincial officialdom, is irrefutable proof that Khlestakov is no one else than the much-dreaded inspector in disguise. Once arrived at this conclusion, the worthy gentlemen, one by one, hasten to pay Khlestakov formal visits. He quickly sizes up the situation and cleverly begins to insinuate that he is the reviser after all.

Amidst the ensuing "comedy of errors", Khlestakov, with an air of virginal innocence, confesses, first, to Dmukhanóvsky, then to the local judge and the postmaster, and, finally, to all of them, that he happens to be a bit short of funds. The city fathers cheerfully leave their little cash souvenirs with the embarrassed tourist in the hope that their official sins will be overlooked.

Dmukhanóvsky feels proud to extend the hospitality of his home to the prominent guest, while Madame Dmukhanóvsky and her daughter, disarmed and conquered by the delightful manners of the young Lovelace, are ready to surrender to him their respective hearts. Khlestakov, who just adores the ladies, first tries to make amorous advances to the Miss and then to her beneficent mother, the first lady of the town. Despite her Balzac age, the virtuous matron is quite captivated by the improvised lover's passionate orations, and merely in the way of a flimsy self-defense, she hesitatingly remarks:

> "But permit me to observe that . . . to a certain extent . . . I am married. . . .",

in response to which Khlestakov utters his classically reassuring phrase:

> "That's nothing, love knows no distinction."

But this does not prevent him, only a few minutes after this tête-à-tête, from proposing his hand and heart to the bailiff's débutante daughter. The parents solemnly bestow their blessing upon the happy couple, and it is only by accident that Khlestakov manages to evade a nuptial tie.

Having thus "trimmed" everybody capable of being "trimmed", in a serene mood and at the climax of his glory, Khlestakov departs—whither no one knows.

However, the fraud is soon discovered by the postmaster who intercepts a letter in which Khlestakov himself frankly describes to a friend of his the full story of his provincial escapade. Presently, his duped victims, assembled at Dmukhanóvsky's house, learn the sad news that the imaginary inspector was but a sheer impostor. At this very moment a courier from St. Petersburg enters the room, announcing in a chilly voice that the real reviser has just arrived in town, and orders every official to report at once.—*Tableau.*

V

KHLESTAKOV, as conceived by Gogol, is a vanishing "neither this nor that" type, one which can be met anywhere, or to put it differently—*everywhere.* Like the source of gossip, Khlestakov evades localization: the microbe of the trivial plague, invisible though it be, penetrates everything, knowing neither barriers nor destination. In this sense, Khlestakov is *omnipresent.* But he is more than that—he is *omnipotent.* In his eloquent tirades he boasts of his many wonderful achievements; according to him, he is the real author of practically every famous novel and an intimate friend of every great writer. Carried on the wings of his imagination, inspired by the lie for its own sake, he paints this glowing picture:

> "I am acquainted with pretty actresses, . . . and I am meeting writers quite frequently. I am on a friendly footing with Poushkin. I used to say to him quite often: 'Well, brother Poushkin, how do things stand?'—'Why, fairly well, brother', he would say,—'Just so-so' . . . Oh, he is a great eccentric! . . . Yes, I am contributing to magazines. . . . By the way, I have written a number of books: *The Marriage of Figaro, Robert the Devil, Norma*—why, I can't even remember all the titles. . . . Everything comes to me by accident. I didn't want to write, but the theatrical manager insisted: 'Oh, please, do write something, old boy!'—So I said to myself, 'Why, all right, old fellow!' And then I think it was on that same evening I wrote everything and thrilled everybody. The buoyancy of my thoughts is extraordinary. . . ."

Khlestakov hypnotizes his audience by the blooming nonsense which he is twittering in a perfectly effortless manner.

> "Khlestakov"—says Gogol—"is by no means lying frigidly, swaggeringly or in a theatrical style. He lies with sentiment, his eyes express delight which is derived from the act itself of lying. Altogether, these are the happiest and most poetic

> moments in his life—they almost amount to inspiration."

Again, referring to the alleged balls he is giving in St. Petersburg, he declaims:

> "It's simply beyond belief: For instance, on the table there is a watermelon served, a watermelon costing seven hundred roubles. In a tureen, soup is delivered by steamer directly from Paris, and when the cover is removed, such steam bursts forth as cannot be found in Nature. I am attending balls every day. We have formed there a whist party of our own: the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the French Ambassador, the British and German Ambassadors and I. . . . Once I even took charge of a Department. Strangely, its Director decamped, but whither no one knew. Naturally, gossip started as to how, and why, and who should assume his post. Many a general volunteered for the job, and tried it, but having got a taste of it, convinced themselves that it was too hard a task. . . . So they saw that there was really nothing else for them to do than to come to me. And at that same moment couriers started running up and down the streets,—couriers, couriers, couriers! Can you imagine!?—Thirty five thousand couriers alone! 'How does the thing stand?' I asked them: 'Please do take charge of that Department, Ivan Alexandrovich!'—I must confess, I was a little bit embarrassed. . . . I even meant to decline, but then I said to myself that the matter might be brought to the attention of the Emperor. . . . 'All right, gentlemen, I accept the post . . . Well, be that as it may—I accept it, but . . .

> be on your guard! Mine is a sharp ear!' . . . Oh yes, I hate to joke, and I did scare everybody. Why, the Imperial Council itself is afraid of me. . . . I am everywhere, everywhere. I am visiting the Palace every day. Not later than tomorrow I shall be promoted to the rank of Field Marsh——"
>
> (Slips and almost falls on the floor, but is subserviently caught by the functionaries.)

Khlestakov succeeds in everything: he can write wonderful books; the government machine is under his thumb; the human mind, to him, is an open book; he is welcome everywhere; he has reached the top rung of the social ladder; he is an habitué in the Imperial Palace; he is the first candidate for the rank of Field Marshal, and, were it not for the untimely slip, he might—who knows?—have been promoted to the office of the Czar himself.

In other words, Gogol claims that Khlestakov is everywhere, or *omnipresent;* that he knows everything, which means that he is *omniscient;* that he is capable of achieving anything, and this makes him *omnipotent.* Thus, the three properties of Divinity are also possessed by Khlestakov—the primordial symbol of the commonplace—perhaps the Devil himself—who, in this neutral guise, must appeal to the "neither this nor that" human type, decaying in an environment of self-conceited mediocrity.

Lermontov has once defined his Demon as something that is "neither day nor night, neither light nor darkness",—a twilight, deprived of either shape or color. Such is also Khlestakov: an immortal being with neither past nor future. No one knows whence he came and whither he goes; he is simply there—omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Indeed, his existence is equivalent to the refutation of the universal law of evolution. Notwithstanding this, he is in a state of perpetual mobility, or incongruous agitation, like some of those tiny colloidal particles in the strange phenomenon of the Brownian movement. His triumphs, though petty, are lasting; they are accepted as something positively granted and forever imbedded in the living tissues of the social order; they are acclaimed by that majority which, if Ibsen be right, is always wrong.

It seemed to Gogol that Khlestakov—the eternal impostor—is much more than a mere sociological phenomenon: he is the incarnation of Evil itself, and as such, he grows to the proportion of a moral issue predicated upon religion. In Khlestakov, the three Divine attributes appear as though in an inverted mirror.

Gogol never doubted the existence of God, but, likewise, he firmly believed in the reality of the Devil, while the coexistence of these two primary principles, mutually excluding each other, gave birth to that metaphysical antinomy which began to torture our author's conscience long before that mind of his had reached the point of final disintegration.

Besides, there was another problem to be solved —one with which theodicy has been hopelessly struggling ever since the Manichaean times, when the ancient Persians expounded their dualistic doctrine of Ahriman and Ormazd: What is the source and purpose of Vice and Evil in a world whose destinies are preordained by God, the Cause of Good and Virtue?—

The facile answer of a Leibnitz that the existence of wickedness is justified as a necessary condition of the greatest moral good, was altogether repugnant to the mentality of Gogol, who, at least in his early days, was firmly convinced that the greatest moral good can be achieved only on condition that Evil be overcome by the free will of man. If so, what was the means of conquering the Devil?— To this Gogol—not the moralist, but the artist governed less by logic than emotion—could have given but one answer: Evil is deprived of its corrupting lure if it is laughed at.

> "Your words"—Gogol once wrote to Sheviriév—"relating to the question of how one can make a fool of the Devil are in complete accord with my own thoughts. For a long time, I have been endeavoring to achieve but one end, namely, that man, after reading my works, should begin to laugh heartily at the Devil."

Gogol knew that La Rochefoucauld was right when he said that "ridicule dishonors more than dishonor itself." It was for this reason that Gogol chose the comedy form for his *Reviser*.

Of course, the term "comedy" should be used here with reservations, for the nature of Gogol's laughter can scarcely be compared with that which sounds in the political satires of Aristophanes, or in the graceful creations of Molière, or in the merry plays of Shakespeare, or in Beaumarchais' immortal farce: Gogol's is decidedly a pathological laughter, a "laughter through tears", as he himself called it. While he does ridicule Khlestakov, trying to make a fool of him, still Khlestakov, the fool, fatally makes the other characters in the play appear as even greater fools. To this extent, then, in creating *The Reviser,* Gogol has defeated his own purpose.

VI

On April 19, 1836, *The Reviser* was performed for the first time on the stage of the Imperial Alexander Theatre in St. Petersburg. Much to Gogol's concern, the crowded audience greeted his play with a storm of indignation. Ánnenkov, a distinguished Russian critic, gave this vivid description of the notable event:

> "Even after the first act, perplexity appeared on all faces (the audience was a picked one in the

> strict sense of the term): it seemed that no one knew what attitude should be taken towards the scenes just witnessed. As if finding alleviation in the presumption that a mere farce was being given, the majority of the audience—led astray from all theatrical expectations and traditions—embraced this interpretation with unshaken resolve. And yet, in this farce there were traits and situations full of such vital truth that, on several occasions, particularly where the play was least in conflict with the customary conception of a comedy, . . . spontaneous laughter broke out. An altogether different thing happened in the fourth act. Now and then laughter still resounded from one end of the hall to the other, but this was timid laughter which would immediately die down; there was practically no applause; instead, there prevailed rapt attention and spasmodic concentration on every shade of the play. At times, dead silence proved that the things transpiring on the stage completely dominated the hearts of the listeners. When this scene came to an end, the original perplexity gave way to almost general indignation which became complete after the fifth act."

This experience proved the turning point in the Russian Molière's psychology. Writing to an unknown correspondent, Gogol stated:

> "*The Reviser* was just performed on the stage, and now my soul is so confused! . . . I knew in advance how the thing would develop, but with all this, a sad, vexing and burdensome feeling absorbs me. My own creation, to me, seems repul-

> sive and odd, as though it were not mine own at all."

Early in 1837, Gogol, who was then abroad, received word from N. Prokopóvich, a friend of his, that *The Reviser* had become "popular", and was even in great vogue on the Neva shores. To this cordial message Gogol replied:

> "I dread to think about all my scribbles. They stand before my eyes somewhat like threatening prosecutors. My soul just longs for oblivion—lasting oblivion. And if only such a moth should appear as would suddenly consume all copies of *The Reviser,* and along with these, *The Arabesques, The Evenings,* together with the rest of my trash, . . . I would feel grateful to Fate."

What could have been the reason for this peculiar frame of mind?—Inadvertently, Gogol himself has nearly answered the question when, shortly after the performance of his comedy, he remarked *"My heroes have not yet dissociated themselves from my own ego."*

The truth is that Gogol's revulsion to *The Reviser*—to use Wilde's metaphor—"was the rage of a Caliban who suddenly perceived his own face in a glass". Russia's greatest realist began to suspect that he was not a realist at all, and that his characters were more products of his own fancy than true interpretations of living types encountered in Russian society of those days. This was a fatal suggestion, which, like an active germ, in the depths of Gogol's subconscious realms, started its destructive work. Many years later, in a letter to Joukovsky, Gogol again reverted to the same theme: "Verily"—he exclaimed—"there is something of Khlestakov in me!"

Gogol started analyzing the actual meaning of his attitude towards that world which he sought to translate in his writings, and he soon reached the conclusion that his whole philosophy could be reduced to a simple equation: Life = Triviality. For virtually all characters created by his genius were but varieties of one and the same persistent prototype, which had its root in the elemental condition of human mediocrity. The long gallery of his "heroes", such as Iván Ivánovich and Iván Nikíforovich; Afanássi Ivánovich and Pulchéria Ivánovna, the lovely couple in the *Old-Fashioned Land Owners;* Shpónka and his Aunty; Podkoléssin and his friend, Kochkarév in *The Wedding,* both involved in an adventure which Gogol called "an altogether incredible episode"; Dmukhanóvsky and his women folk; the classical characters of the Postmaster, the Judge and Ossip in *The Reviser*—all of them personify some particular phase of the "Eternal Trivial". This inability to discern in the iridescent spectrum of life any color other than the grey, devoid of chromatic nuances, was a strange form of Daltonism, which harmfully affected Gogol's creative faculties.

Continuously pondering over the idea of the Devil, which to Gogol was synonymous with all that is vulgar and petty, he gradually lost the power to record anything but the banal, and ultimately, his writings began to be tainted with hyperbolism of the little. Merejkovsky, one of the ablest living critics, very correctly suggested that: "Gogol achieved in the field of moral measurements that which Leibnitz accomplished in mathematics; he discovered, as it were, the differential calculus, the infinitely great significance of the infinitely small quantities in the domain of right and wrong."

VII

THE theme of *The Reviser* was suggested to Gogol by Poushkin, in whose Hellenic and healthy philosophy, wit and jest have always played a momentous part. Poushkin's humor was largely a good-natured and serene *jeu d'esprit.* Hence, he regarded the incident which was to become the plot of Gogol's play as but a light and funny story which could be easily injected into some brilliant table talk of an experienced toastmaster.

Fatally, in Gogol's interpretation, Poushkin's anecdote turned into a religious problem of hyperbolic proportions. Gogol desperately tried, but emphatically failed, to find an escape out of the nonplus of the mystical coexistence of God and Devil, Good and Evil. Yet, it was Gogol himself who created Khlestakov, a symbol "confounded though immortal". What was there in Gogol's own creations to counter-balance Khlestakov?—

Obviously, at this point, he could not have rested his case: the "boos" of the theatrical public at *The Reviser, in se,* had little bearing upon Gogol's moods during this initial stage of his inner drama. Certainly, the unfriendly reception of the comedy on the part of various intellectuals, could not have affected in the least his literary reputation: his fame was so unrivalled that, in 1835, while Poushkin was still alive,* and when Gogol was only twenty-six, Bielinsky wrote:

> ". . . Gogol possesses a talent which is extraordinary, potent and lofty. At least, just now, he is the leader in the literary field, the dean of our poets, and he has assumed the place which has been abandoned by Poushkin."

Nor did the public grasp the mystical aspect of *The Reviser*. Outwardly, the treatment of the subject was so comic that, at the time, no one suspected the invisible presence of the dæmonic undercurrent in a play which the majority was inclined to take as something in the order of a simple buffoonade. If Gogol's psychic conflict was in any sense aggravated by the whims of public opinion, their rôle was a purely catalytic one, having perhaps accelerated the cementation of his outlook on art as an educational device subordinate to ethics, and not aesthetics. This viewpoint brought Gogol closer to Tolstoy and Ruskin than to either Wilde,—who worshipped art for its own sake, for "the element of song in the singing", "the scheme and symphony of the color", "the satisfying beauty of the design", —or to Poushkin, with his lulling melody:

---

* Poushkin died January 29, 1837.

Not for earthly agitation,
Not for gain or battle grounds,—
We are born for inspiration,
Rev'rend prayers and sweet sounds.

It was after the experience with *The Reviser* that Gogol made a departure, definite and decisive, from those zealous aesthetes who conceived in the artist little more than a priest of the Beautiful, and in Art—nothing but "a thing of Beauty" or "a joy forever", for this, indeed, was the credo which was so dear to the hearts of the *jeunes guérriers du drapeau romantique,* as Theophile Gautier has christened those ardent minstrels of Utopia and Fancy.

Bitter a satire as it was, *The Reviser,* after all, taught no social lesson and laid down no great moral principle. On this ground alone it would have been impossible for Gogol, at this stage of his psychological rovings, to strike a balance sheet with only Khlestakov on its asset side.

More important still: Khlestakov, the Devil, as moulded by Gogol, was the sole victor on the battle field of life; all others, including the author himself, were his victims. Gogol instinctively declined to recognize the legitimacy of a *status quo* which would have meant either peace, or at least truce, with the Enemy of Mankind.

Such was the somewhat involved psychological background of our poet at the time when he felt impelled to create *The Dead Souls*—his last great work.

VIII

IN THE case of *The Dead Souls,* Poushkin also acted as godfather of the novel: jokingly and *en passant,* he related to Gogol the story of a swindler who was "professionally" engaged in buying up titles to "dead souls", or noblemen's serfs, who had long ago died. The slave owners were not in the least deterred by the trifling prices offered to them for this peculiar "merchandise", for they were only too glad to get something—small as it be—for nothing—for ex-human beings who, meanwhile, were peacefully reposing in their graves; and so, cheerfully, they executed most formal bills of sale, and equipped with these fake "instruments", the enterprising crook managed to borrow large sums from *bona fide* but duped creditors.

The tale, whether true or not, amounted to little; but Gogol decided to use it, possibly on the theory *se non e vero—e ben trovato.**

Russia—it will be recalled—was then living through a period of social decomposition. The old order, founded on servitude, was rapidly coming to an end; the Sixties', known as the Epoch of the Great Reforms, were still quite remote, while as any transition period, the Forties' in Russian history were permeated with countless contradictions and most paradoxical situations. The landowners' class, as a whole, was desperately clinging to its traditional privileges, though it was obvious that the feudal system had already outlived its day. The economic future of both the nobility and the farmers was utterly uncertain. The Government was oscillating between immediate action and continued inaction. Plans for the liberation of the peasants, if such existed at all, were little more than nebulous bureaucratic schemes which lay buried under the green cloth of the drowsy chanceries. It was at this moment, amidst general confusion, that the searchlight of Gogol's genius suddenly threw a sheaf of penetrating rays into the night which hid under its dark mantle the land of the Dead Souls.

Like *Eugene Onegin,* Gogol's novel grew into a huge canvas, on which Russian provincial life was pictured in its divergent aspects. All social strata—state functionaries, landowners, artisans, peasants, domestic servants, workers, merchants—defile before the reader's eyes in an endless procession. The whole gamut of superstitions and queer habits; ossified traditions and shifting whims; petty interests and elemental gossip of Russia's "Main Street", with all its vulgar ugliness, dark backwardness and boundless mediocrity, were exhibited here with such graphic clearness and concentrated power that Gogol's creation produced the effect of a mighty explosion which shook Russian society to its very foundation.

---

* Even if not true, it is well invented.

A great master of detail, like some of those P.R.B. painters, Gogol unfolded a panorama of Russian life with photographic accuracy: one emerges from the reading of *The Dead Souls* with an intimate knowledge of what and when the people in those days were wearing; where and what they were eating; how and why they were travelling. Every trifling trait of their domestic settings is inquisitively described—the quality and colors of draperies, the shades of fancy ribbons women used to embellish their fair appearances, the type of buttons on men's cutaways, all minute particulars about footwear and shoe polish, the blend of tobaccos and the makes of pipes, and so on *ad infinitum.*

But strangely, despite this epidemic of details, and notwithstanding the naturalistic treatment of the characters, the reader can scarcely concede that Gogol's are living personages: their realism seems unreal; their features—fantastic; their manners—overrated; their vices—overstated, and the motley picture is overburdened and overdone. The whole range of Gogol's types leaves a queer and uneasy sensation similar to that which one experiences in the *Musée Grevin,* with its minutely faithful wax mannikins of people who once were bone and flesh. It even seems that Gogol himself does not believe in the realness of his characters, and that the colorful accumulation of the descriptive material merely serves to conceal the fact that all these moving caricatures are phantoms, "dead souls", and not living beings at all.

This, at least, is the modern view of Gogol's famous novel. But in the days when it was written, both critics and public have overlooked the peculiar light in which the picture of a great country was presented, and the classical *"comédie humaine"* was unanimously acclaimed as the greatest achievement in the field of Russian belles lettres. Bielinsky's high praise of the First Part of *The Dead Souls* faithfully reflected the widespread excitement of the reading masses over Gogol's bold revelations:

> "Suddenly",—says Bielinsky—"like a refreshing flash of lightning, amidst weary, pestilential heat and drought, there emerges a creation which is purely Russian, national, carved out of the innermost depths of popular existence, at once truthful and patriotic, mercilessly tearing off the veil

> from reality and permeated with passionate, nervous, tender love for the productive kernel of Russian life; a creation immensely artistic in its conception and execution, in the psychology of its characters and details of Russian tradition, and at the same time, one that is an outgrowth of profound thought, full of social, civic and historical significance. . . . In *The Dead Souls,* the author has made such a gigantic stride forward that, compared with it, everything hitherto written by him appears to be weak and dull."

Gogol sought to follow Poushkin in his objective and dispassionate treatment of Russian reality. The standard set by *Eugene Onegin* instinctively appealed to Gogol. He would have gladly given in prose that which Poushkin achieved in verse and rhyme. But, in order that he could have attained this level of perfection, it would have been necessary for him to overcome the oppressive malady of hyperbolism. For Gogol, such a feat was beyond his power, and very justly Apollo Grigoriev, a critic of unusual insight who, in the Fifties' assumed the place left vacant after Bielinsky's death, pronounced this verdict:

> "Speaking generally, not only in the world of our artistic, but also social and moral leanings, Poushkin is the first and the true representative of our physiognomy. Gogol, a strictly negative poet, became merely the scale of our antipathies and a living organ of their legality. . . . However, our

blood, racial and vital sympathies he proved impotent to reveal. . . ."

IX

CHICHIKOV, the hero of *The Dead Souls,* has often been compared with Khlestakov, although, in more than one respect, they are antipodes, and the outward disparity between the two is quite obvious: Khlestakov is slim and light as down, outspoken and eloquent; Chichikov is ponderous and fat as a Thanksgiving turkey, taciturn and reserved in his manners—a convinced positivist, like one of those disciples of August Comte. Khlestakov is a tireless *causeur,* and his outlook on life is that of a loose-minded Whig; Chichikov is a steadfast *builder,* a narrow-minded Tory and slow thinker of the fundamentalist breed. Khlestakov is giddy and vain, while Chichikov—calculating and bashful. Khlestakov is mobile as quicksilver; Chichikov is sluggish and phlegmatic. Khlestakov, the incurable Don Juan and provincial lion, is an expert relisher of the female sex, whereas Chichikov pretends to be virtuous, if not altogether a prude.

Notwithstanding these conspicuous contrasts, Chichikov, in fact, is the prolongation of Khlestakov, the reverse side of the same medal, the second face of the two-faced Janus. Khlestakov and Chichikov have one common root, one underlying cause of their coexistence, which is elemental mediocrity.

The realistic aspect of the two "heroes" should not be taken too seriously, since closer scrutiny shows that they are both phantasmagorial "dead souls", nonentities which, though symbolizing a moral principle unquestionably real, exist only in the imagination of the author. Among the fundamental traits of their psychic constitution is that remarkable gift for assuming illusive appearances which enables them to become clever actors on the crowded stage of life. Gogol himself thus interpreted the element of deceit in Khlestakov:

> "To lie",—he said—"means to utter a falsehood in a tone so close to truth, so natural and naïve, as truth alone is capable of being expressed. . . . Khlestakov is an adroit fellow, altogether *comme il faut,* clever and perhaps even virtuous. . . ."

At the same time, a lie is always intangible and evasive, and this is why Khlestakov, again, according to Gogol,

> ". . . is endowed with no character, that is, with no physiognomy or any definable outward countenance of his own."

While Chichikov does possess specific, even quite distinct, physical characteristics, including a round and well-intentioned "belly", nevertheless, like Khlestakov, he displays in his business colloquies a flair for crafty deception.

The firmly ingrained acquisitive instinct teaches him the difficult lesson of defrauding anyone with whom he comes in contact. Chichikov, a first-class "psychologist", understands his audience, and he knows which particular bait is likely to tempt the particular fish. He also manifests an ingenious grasp of the mysterious ways and means in which an antiquated state machine is liable to function. He has a shrewd appreciation of the delicate art of bribing, which plays such a helpful part in the promotion of his mercantile schemes: "How much?", "Whom to?", "Precisely when?"—all these questions are admirably solved by Chichikov.

A capable amateur, at times, will lie without blushing, but it is only a maestro, such as Chichikov, who can blush without lying, when he has reason to believe that an air of embarrassed innocence will convince the fool or disarm the crook.

Chichikov is a man of the world; his manners are suave and smooth as his cleanly shaven double chin. He knows perfectly well that it is part of the social code to conceal one's own vices, and that it is only the simpleton who advertises his virtues. Accordingly, he tries to be genteel and modest as a "fair maiden of olden days". Still, even in the exercise of modesty, he carefully avoids overdoing anything lest he be suspected of being too virtuous. The plump little fortune which he manages to build up for himself is the result of his own industry, thrifty practices and careful planning. But, contrary to a Falstaff or a Khlestakov, he does not like to brag about his accomplishments; he just ponders over these in silence.

Khlestakov "confesses" that he is a person of great social weight and he proclaims his rank of Field Marshal with drum beating; Chichikov is too cautious to indulge in any bombastic titles, but, unhesitatingly, he does embrace the Napoleonic credo: *"Everything is permitted"*.

Khlestakov—the Field Marshal, and Chichikov—the Napoleon—what can be more absurd?—And yet, this is what they actually became in the fields of their respective endeavors: Khlestakov survives in history as an immortal impostor, Chichikov—as a classical and unrivalled money-getter.

X

GOGOL grasped the mysterious, if not mystical, substance of Chichikov—the most realistic among his characters. When, finally, his hero's fraudulent machinations with the "dead souls" turned into a public scandal, an official investigation was ordered. However, it only increased the confusion in the minds of the wise community over the true significance of Chichikov's hidden nature:

> "All inquiries"—Gogol tells us—"made by the authorities revealed to them only one thing—that they could not for certain frame any opinion as

> to who Chichikov actually was: Was he an ill-intentioned person who should be apprehended, or, on the contrary, was he a man who himself could arrest them as suspicious characters? . . . The Postmaster cleverly suggested that Chichikov was a dangerous bandit, a highway robber of the Stenka Razin * type. Others went even further: It was hinted that Chichikov is Napoleon in disguise; that England has long been envying Russia because of her enormous territory . . . that, perhaps the English may have released Napoleon from the island of St. Helena and that, now, he has wormed his way to Russia in the guise of Chichikov, even though, as a matter of fact, he is not Chichikov at all."

Thus, a legend begins to weave itself around the name of Chichikov, although there is hardly anything whether mysterious or mystical about him. He is simply a new variation of the old theme of dæmonic triviality; in his case a sociological situation is again refracted through the prism of religion and ethics. As the novel progresses, the basic Devil-Evil idea rises above the social horizon like a dark cloud, spreading general stupefaction among the rank and file.

In Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment,* Raskolnikov dreams in delirium of a dreadful plague, whose germs enter into human bodies, and those affected by them immediately become possessed with the Devil.

---

* Stenka Razin was a notorious Russian brigand of the Seventeenth Century.

> "Entire communities and cities, whole nations began to suffer from this disease and acted as insane. . . . No one knew who and how should be prosecuted, nor what should be conceived as right and wrong."

Dostoievsky uses a solemn tongue. But Gogol, the satirist, dwelling upon a similar social epidemic, sounds a comic note:

> "Real chaos ensued: One denunciation followed another, and litigations which were never known to exist, and which actually never did exist under the sun, began to spring up. Scandals, seductions, and everything in general became so mixed up and interwoven with the Chichikov story and the dead souls, that it was impossible to comprehend which one of these claims constituted the principal nonsense. . . . A rather shrewd and efficient government clerk who was ordered to prepare a brief on the matter, almost went insane. . . . Famine developed in one section of the province. . . . In another—heretics started to move. Somebody launched the rumor among them *that Anti-Christ had been born, and that he was seeking to disturb even the deceased, by trading in dead souls.* People began to confess their sins and sin again, and under the pretext of capturing the Anti-Christ, non-Anti-Christs were slain."

This, then, is the paradoxical itinerary: from Chichikov, the common-law felon—through Chichikov, the Napoleon—to Chichikov, the Anti-Christ.

In *The Dead Souls,* Gogol made a renewed attempt to ridicule the Satanic principle, but here he failed even more emphatically than in his *Reviser:* whether at large or in jail, Chichikov is the real triumpher; he succeeds in defrauding an entire community which becomes a fit playground for the Serpent's foul game. Each one of the *dies minori* in Gogol's novel could have, with full justification, repeated Poushkin's

"It is so easy to deceive me:
Indeed, I long to be deceived."

The iron bars, behind which Chichikov ultimately lands, were introduced by Gogol as a mere apology for the overwhelming imbecility and inherent crookedness of those over whom Chichikov reigns supreme. Of these souls who, though ostensibly alive, are morally dead beyond any hope of resurrection, Chichikov, the Devil, is the legitimate owner and indisputable master. Between him and the rest of the community there is only a quantitative, but not qualitative, difference. In some measure, in one form or another, they all are in a state of complete putrefaction, and to this extent they stand in direct contradiction to that order of things which embodies the idea of virtue and the fundamental Law of God.

Once more Gogol found himself confronted with this troublesome question: Was the picture he had painted in *The Dead Souls* a true picture of that

Russia of which he himself was an inseparable part?—Or was it a gigantic burlesque—the product of an imbalanced mind, suffering from psychic Daltonism?—

A seemingly insignificant episode brought this state of bewilderment to a sudden climax: having completed the First Part of his *Dead Souls,* Gogol read it to Poushkin, who, at first, followed the tale with delight, and laughed wholeheartedly; but as the story unrolled, he grew pensive, and when the reading came to an end, he exclaimed: *"Good Lord, isn't Russia pitiful?"* This brief comment produced on Gogol a painful effect, confirming him in the dreadful suspicion that not only were his Khlestakovs and Chichikovs dishonest deceivers, but that he, Gogol himself, owing to his mighty but ill genius, was involuntarily and artificially building up a wicked libel against a whole nation which he passionately loved.

Possibly Poushkin's dolorous remark prompted Gogol to preface the Second Part of his novel with these apologetic and sadly true words:

> "Why should one portray misery and nothing but misery and imperfections of our life, digging up people from the dark and remote crooked lanes of a country?—What is to be done if such is the nature of the author who, *having fallen ill of his own imperfections,* is no longer capable of painting anything but misery . . . and imperfections of our life, digging up people from the dark and remote crooked lanes of his country!"

Gogol knew that he was a mental invalid, and gradually, he became convinced that his talent, though fertile and brilliant, was misdirected, incomplete, deceitful, and therefore, necessarily destructive.

There was nothing else for him than to dispel somehow the false impression of Russian life which, he felt, the First Part of *The Dead Souls* must have produced. And so, he made it his business to find, within the frame of Russian reality, genuine characters, noble traits and sunny spots amidst a sea of dark grey colors which form the Rembrandtesque background of the original picture.

That such was Gogol's mood at the time is borne out by a sentence from a letter dating back to 1850, which he wrote to Count A. Orloff:

> ". . . The purpose of my work is not unimportant. In the remaining portions of *The Dead Souls,* on which I am now laboring, the Russian is shown, not from the standpoint of the trivial traits of his character, his vulgarity and queerness, but in all the depth of his nature and the rich variety of the inner powers concealed within him. Many things which seem to have been forgotten, neglected or abandoned, should be graphically brought out in vivid and appealing images. . . ."

XI

SUCH was the task which Gogol sought to achieve in the concluding chapters of his masterpiece, as well as in *The Selected Portions from the Correspondence with Friends,* which was his funeral hymn. This, indeed, was a Herculean undertaking because, at that time, the toxin of disharmony had already produced that fatal split in his consciousness which no logical reasoning could have cured.

In 1845, subsequent to the publication of the First Part of *The Dead Souls,* and while he was still striving to banish the obsessional dæmonic idea, Gogol wrote to Alexandra Smirnóva a letter full of sorrow, and there he confessed:

> "I tortured and compelled myself to write: Cognizant of my impotence, I suffered acute pain, and more than once the coercion to which I resorted, made me ill. But I was able to accomplish nothing and everything came out unnaturally and badly."

And then a few days later, he reverted to the same subject in a note to M. N. Yazikov:

> "All the time"—complains Gogol—"I am in a suffering and disturbed state. Up to this day I had no strength to either write or work, and the slightest effort makes me ill; the worst part of it is that this condition is always accompanied by anguish from which I can find no escape."

Mental dullness, apathy, total loss of creative energy, hypochondriac moods—such were the immediate consequences of Gogol's auto-coercion to which he wilfully subjected himself in a vain attempt to trace amidst the human multitudes a character—at least one—which would be blessed with a living soul. Toil of this kind was nothing less than continuous agony which, slowly but surely, drop by drop, was drawing out of Gogol his life's blood.

> "My work"—again laments Gogol—"does not progress at all; there are words which I have to extract with forceps."

And further:

> "I do not work, I do not live, even though others as yet cannot see it."

How different were Poushkin's poetic moods!—A mere call of the Muse in a flash would arouse in him an irresistible creative urge. The poet himself initiated us into the mystery of the birth of the rhyme when his soul awoke to the distant sounds of the celestial harp:

> "And daring thoughts begin to move and caper,
> And rhymes meet them as in an endless row,
> The fingers seek a pen, the pen is set to paper,
> And instantly,—free verses start to flow."

Much as Gogol tried to convince the public and himself that all his previous creations were worthless, if not harmful, and also, that only the concluding part of *The Dead Souls* was morally constructive,—its fiasco was too apparent to be denied. Several persons to whom Gogol had read the newly written chapters could hardly conceal from him their utter disappointment. A great artist, like Gogol, must have divined that all these pseudo-virtuous characters creeping out in the Second Part were little more than literary weaklings, artificial creatures, devoid of life and color. Gogol knew that they, too were *dead* souls. The pretentious sermons which they mumble smack of copy-book ethics; they carry no appeal and they sound strangely unconvincing.

No wonder, then, that Gogol found no consolation in his weary wanderings along the barren highways of ascetic morality.

XII

ARTISTS and women . . . Women and artists . . . Eternal companions in the feasts and labors of life . . . Many a Pygmalion would have never achieved perfection were it not for his Galatea. Not to speak of such eternal lovers as Goethe and Poushkin and Liszt,—what would have been Victor Hugo without Adèle Foucher and Juliette Drouet, his guardian angels? Or Turgenev, the dreamer of dreams, the singer of songs about "Triumphant Love", without the inspiring influence of Madame Viardo? Or, indeed, Wagner—without Mathilda Wesendonck, the Isolde of his heart,—Wagner who himself coined the famous maxim: "I cannot conceive the spirit of Music residing elsewhere than in Love."

Yet Gogol's life was strangely devoid of that element which is spoken of as *"Das Ewig Weibliche"*. Women exercised virtually no influence upon him, although there were a few—for instance, Countess Wielgórsky and Alexandra Smirnóva—whose friendships he cultivated and treasured.

Even Gogol's much debated devotion to his mother was of a rather peculiar kind: undoubtedly, he was a good and respectful son; still, a mere glance at their correspondence conclusively goes to show the absence of anything resembling tender feelings on Gogol's part.

At the age of thirteen, he wrote these lines:

> "Permit me, dear Mother, to congratulate you upon your Saint's Day, which is the happiest day for every loving and gentle son. Your motherly solicitude and fondness, your benevolence and your care of me—all this prompts me to write you, expressing to you my gratitude."

The opening paragraph in one of Gogol's subsequent letters to her reads:

> "The news from you are curious and entertaining. I participated, as it were, in all your schemes and building plans; at least my thoughts were over there. When reading your letter I was with you. I was quite impressed by your maternal advice, and I swore in my heart to always abide by it. Nevertheless, I noticed nothing in my behavior

> which would have justified your reproach. I always loved my relatives; I never evaded them no matter to what rank they belonged. . . ."

And so forth—a monotonous weaving of frigid sentences, sometimes with an admixture of youthful sentimentalism, but, more often, taken up with rather *terre à terre* matters.

No woman has ever had access to Gogol's heart, and perhaps owing to this, in both his life and literary work, he treated the alluring theme of romance and love purely *in abstracto.* Even those among his male heroes who, like Vakula, the blacksmith, or Levko, in *The May Night,* or Andrew in *Tarás Búlba,* are urged by the author to act *con amore,* seem conspicuously asexual, formal and reserved, with no traits in common with a Romeo, a Werther, or the whole array of Turgenev's lovers.

However, there were two outstanding influences in Gogol's psychic life: One was Poushkin—the lucid genius of Russia, the inspired builder of Russian classicism, the Bach of Russian poetry, the greatest among Russia's great writers.

What was the other influence?—Father Mathew—a humble, half-educated provincial priest, a religious fanatic, a gloomy ascetic, whose very name would have vanished in oblivion were it not for the fact that he was a friend of Gogol.—Poushkin was Gogol's happy beginning; Father Mathew—his tragic end.

The news of Poushkin's death was communicated to Gogol, who was then abroad, by N. N. Pogódin. From the letter which Gogol wrote in reply, the depth of his despair may be judged:

> "I received your letter in Rome. It is permeated with that which now fills all our thoughts. I say nothing about the magnitude of the loss, but my loss is the greatest of all. You grieve as a Russian, as a writer, but I . . . I am unable to express even one-hundredth of my sorrow. My life, my sovereign delight, died with his death. The happiest moments of my life were those when I was creating. When I was creating, I saw before me Poushkin only. I attached no significance to gossip; I spat upon the despicable rabble, and I only treasured *his* eternal and unfailing judgment. I undertook nothing, I wrote nothing, without his advice; everything that is good in me is due to him. And my present work * is also a creation of his. He took an oath from me that I will write, and not a line has been written without his appearing to my mind. I rejoiced over the idea of how he will be pleased; I tried to guess what would please him, and this was my supreme and prime reward. Henceforth there will be no such reward! What is my work worth? What is now my life worth?"

Gogol loved in Poushkin not merely his universal genius, his wit and wisdom, his unique penetration into the human soul, but also that which he, Gogol, conspicuously lacked—undisturbed harmony, of which Poushkin, the man, and Poushkin, the poet, was the most complete and utterly flawless incarnation.

---

* *The Dead Souls.*

If not logically, surely psychologically, Gogol felt that in Christianity, besides the way of Mary, there is also, or at least, should be, the way of Martha, and that, in the final analysis, the abstract spirit is not an antithesis of, but rather a complement to, the living matter which is just as integral a part of the Divine Plan as Universal Reason itself. So long as Gogol remained under the "heathen" influence of Poushkin, he clearly comprehended the lasting truth of Sappho's words:

"To live, Phaón,
Is still life's greatest goal."

Gogol perceived in Poushkin the triumph of Life over the dark and frigid eternity of Death, an idea which Poushkin himself so beautifully expressed in the concluding lines of his *Stanzas:*

"Let fresh young life be ever playing
Around the portal of my tomb,
Let Nature ever be displaying
Her careless charm, her fadeless bloom."

But with Poushkin's premature death, Gogol lost something which he pathetically needed—his Eastern Star, that kept his mental powers in a state of relative balance. Now he was alone in this dull world, with no one to lead him through the labyrinth of endless doubts, as though a Dante who would have been suddenly deprived in the Inferno of Virgil's guiding hand.

XIII

FROM now on, there was nothing more to check in Gogol the growing tide of his religious mysticism with its negation of all material things, and its aversion to the principle of beauty. Literature, in the sense of man's aesthetical self-expression, satisfied him no longer. Like Tolstoy several decades later, Gogol began to feel that Art of every kind, including his own creations, was a manifestation of sin, a vicious challenge to the idea of Christianity. By inertia, or as though in an obscure state of post-epileptic automatism, he carried on with his daily tasks. But whatever his mind may have produced during that period was sadly devoid of that *élan vital,* as Bergson calls it, which is at once the form and essence of all artistic thought.

At times, happy moods would still visit Gogol, and then, but for brief intervals only, he would be regaining the faculty of seeing this earth through the veil of jubilant humor and happy laughter. Alas, these were rare moments, and they were followed by protracted paroxysms of gloom and hopeless anguish.

In 1845, giving way to morbid melancholy, Gogol burned the manuscript of the Second Part of

The Dead Souls. Temporarily, this insane act seemed to have alleviated his conscience, and he resumed his weary labor for the completion of that work which had become a necessary condition of his continued physical existence.

Unfortunately, it was precisely then, in the middle of the Forties', that Father Mathew's influence began to intervene in Gogol's solitary life.

Little is known of the genesis of our writer's strange devotion to that mediocre priest, who, according to those who knew him, was, at the best, a man of sincere convictions and unquestioned loyalty to the Orthodox Church. He was endowed with an innate talent of a preacher, and his sermons—it is said—exercised a potent influence upon his Rjev parishioners. Aside from this, Father Mathew was scarcely above the somewhat shallow level of Russian provincial priesthood of those days. He knew virtually nothing about theology, and still less about science. Nothing outside the narrow limits of parochial ethics either interested him or was tolerated by him. An implacable foe of this world which, to him, was the epitome of evil, he saw no other method of dealing with life than that of renouncing it. Apparently he took no heed of Christ's warning "When ye fast, be not as hypocrites, of a sad countenance", for he insisted that salvation could be achieved only through uncompromising asceticism and merciless suppression of the flesh.

Father Mathew was the living interpretation of that wing of Christian thought which, indeed, is a far greater menace to Christianity and religion in general than even the most blasphemous denunciations of Christ, such as are daily uttered at anarchistic forums. His reasoning reminds one rather of Savonarola's fierce fanaticism than of the beautiful and holy faith of a Francis d'Assise or a Father Zosima, Dostoievsky's saintly monk, whose whole philosophy was Love:

> "Love ye man in his sin, as this is already a semblance of Divine Love and the perfection of love on Earth. Love ye all creatures of God, in their entirety, as well as every particle of creation."

Father Mathew was the direct negation of Poushkin, with his irresistibly contagious laughter and the mere gladness of being young. For Poushkin, the Universe was an harmonic cosmos, for Father Mathew—an incongruent chaos; Poushkin believed that God was the Word, or Reason, and Reason was the Word, or God; Father Mathew regarded God as something in the order of a wrathful Jehovah, ready to smite every sinner and eager to persecute the human race for its being human.

After all, Gogol had to choose between Poushkin and Father Mathew. It was not without resistance and not without a good deal of hesitation that he finally did choose Father Mathew.

Gogol never was an agnostic or a *libre penseur,* such as Renan, with his complaisant, but not too penetrating credo: *"la foi disparue—la morale reste."* * Religion constantly dominated his mind, and even in the Devil's shadow, he always perceived the image of Christ.

But in the conflict between Poushkin and Father Mathew there was one point which to Gogol was particularly disturbing: Poushkin's whole life was dedicated to Poetry and Art, and Gogol felt that his own life was unthinkable without Poetry and Art. For Gogol, to live was to write. Father Mathew, however, believed that to write was to sin, and sin, in his view, was synonymous with Death. With his colorless and obtuse imagination, that apostle of temperance was unable to comprehend that there is no irreconcilable conflict between the Beautiful and the Noble; that if a poet's dream transforms itself into a symphony of cadenced rhymes; or if, as in Correggio's canvases, it is translated into a melody of color and design; or if, as in Chopin's scherzos, it becomes an undying poem of harmonies and sounds,—these things, though genuinely beautiful, because of this, are neither devoid of the moral ideal nor lacking in that pure fragrance of a lily of the valley in whose delicate aroma we scent the breath of Him who created it, so that we may be blessing and worshipping Him in our humble hearts.

This simple truth Father Mathew was unable to grasp, and he kept urging Gogol not only to give up writing forever, but also to retire from the world, secluding himself for the rest of his life in a monk's cell. Much as Gogol was devoted to Father Mathew, he revolted against the idea of surrendering his poet's lyre for a monastic cowl.

---

* "With faith dead, morality still remains."

Intuitively, he knew that by the exercise of his talent he was performing a useful public service; and once, having gathered all his courage, he wrote the priest:

> ". . . I do not know whether I will ever rid myself of the label of a writer as I am not sure that this is God's will. . . . I will confess to you that, up to this day, I am convinced that the dictates of Christ can be carried by anyone to any place, even beyond prison walls, and that His commandments can be obeyed in every vocation and social walk; they can likewise be followed in the writer's profession. If a writer is endowed with talent, surely it is not without reason, and not for the purpose of putting it to evil uses. If an artist be inclined towards painting, surely God, and no one else, is responsible for this proclivity. . . . If I only knew that in some other profession, better than in my own, I could be working for the salvation of my soul and pursuant to everything which I should be complying with, I would turn to that other field. If I only knew that in a monastery I could retire from the world, I would enter a monastery. But in a convent, too, we are surrounded by the same world; the same temptations are besieging us, and there, one has to war and struggle against our Enemy just the same. In a word,

> there is no such profession, nor is there such a place in the world where one could retire from the world. . . ."

In this rebuttal, Gogol expressed in words clear and simple a thought which later became the focal idea of Flaubert's *Temptations of St. Anthony.*

Still, Gogol's dissatisfaction with his own creations, especially *The Reviser* and *The Dead Souls,* prompted him to desert the field of belles lettres for theology and ethics. Torn asunder by the polar trends which devastated his mind, it was only natural for him to have gone from one extreme to another—from sweeping condemnation of Russia to a determined defense of her political structure and intellectual standards. This he accomplished, in 1846, with the publication of *The Selected Portions from the Correspondence with Friends,* a book which instantly precipitated a public scandal so memorable in Russian literary chronicles. In touching harmony with the public, the critics at once started accusing Gogol of all sorts of crimes, including high treason against the liberal code.

For a while, it had become a fashionable affair to denounce Gogol in deliberately insulting terms. Many of the more emotional amongst his zoilists hastened to declare him insane, and even some of his so-called friends adopted the habit of not recognizing him. Bielinsky, one of Gogol's most ardent admirers, was thrown into a state of hysterical rage; he wrote him a flaming letter, full of bitter reproaches, using expressions, for instance, like these:

> "Preacher of the Whip, Apostle of Ignorance, Advocate of Obscurantism and Reaction, Panegyrist of Tartar customs, what are you doing?! . . ."

These lines—it will be remembered—were written by the recognized dean of the Russian critics who was then actually dying; in radical quarters this letter became known as his "swan song".

Summing up the tumult created by the publication of *The Selected Portions,* Gogol, in his *Author's Confession,* observed:

> "Everybody is agreed that, so far, no book has ever caused as many comments as *The Selected Portions*. . . . And the most remarkable thing—a thing which possibly has never occurred in any literature—is that it was not the book itself, but its author, who became the subject of all comments and criticisms. Suspiciously and distrustfully was every word analyzed, and everybody hurried to explain the source out of which it grew. Upon the . . . body of a man, who was still living, a dreadful autopsy was performed that would have thrown into a cold sweat even a person endowed with a solid constitution."

XIV

WHAT was the cause of public revolt against Gogol?—For the first time, he appeared to the mass of the Russian readers not as a poet but as a philosopher. Now his deceiving laughter that kept his inner "I" masterfully concealed from everybody, died away; the grotesque caricatures painted by his brush were swept to the background and banished. And there he stood, before a watchful crowd, with all his delusions about the Devil and all his doubts about the reality of Khlestakov. Despite *The Reviser* and *The Dead Souls,* Gogol's faith in Holy Russia, Russia of the saints and the martyrs, ostensibly remained unshaken. But the farce was over and the sermon had begun.

For once, in *The Selected Portions,* Gogol—somewhat like Oscar Wilde in *De Profundis*—made the attempt to appeal not to the wit but to the wisdom of his audience. Nobly and passionately, he raised his voice in defense of religion in an age that no longer was credulous, and which was still under the earnest impression

"That if in reality there be a God,
He is oxygenic in substance." *

But Gogol never had much use for the loud but empty phraseology of a Voltaire or the godless meditations of a Proudhon. Neither Khlestakov nor Chichikov could convince him that the Church and Christ and God were simply meaningless words taken from an obsolete vocabulary. On the contrary, Gogol, notwithstanding all his quandaries and hesitations, remained faithful to the Church which, in his view, was the citadel of Russia's past and future,—

---

* From Count Alexis Tolstoy's satirical poem *Potók—the Valiant Knight.*

> "that Church which,"—according to him—"like a chaste virgin, alone, ever since the apostolic days, has conserved its original virtuous purity; that Church which, with its profound dogmas and the slightest outward rites, was as though carried straight from Heaven to the Russian people; that Church which alone is capable of disentangling all our entangling knots and problems; which may, in the sight of all Europe, reveal an unheard of miracle, compelling all strata, ranks and classes to enter within their legitimate boundaries, and, without changing anything in the state structure, will convey strength to Russia, and will astound the whole world by the harmony of the proportions of that very organism which heretofore has been frightening it."—"Yes,"—concluded Gogol—"this Church is unknown to us, —a Church, which was created for the sake of life, we have not as yet introduced in our own lives."

But did not the Church teach: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven", "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth", "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"?—And so humility and nonresistance to evil were proclaimed by Gogol, in *The Selected Portions,* as the Alpha and Omega of his faith. To this extent, then, his new work may be justly called a prelude to Tolstoy's religious philosophy as he framed it in *The Thoughts About God* and *The Kingdom of Heaven Within Us.*

Not that Gogol ever doubted the primordial reality of evil—for the author of *The Reviser* a doubt such as this would have been inconceivable —but he did question the wisdom of attempting to cure a sociological disease by any remedy other than the ontological, or inner, betterment of man.

Viewed from this angle, the structure and functions of society, its politics and economics, were matters wholly external to the focal task of achieving the purification of the human spirit and the ultimate *rapprochement* between the creature and his Creator. Rather consistently with this doctrine, Gogol concluded that his previous literary quests deserved nothing but condemnation. This he unequivocally proclaimed in the Preface to *The Selected Portions.*

> "I was seriously ill,"—writes Gogol—"death was already quite close to me. Having gathered the remnants of my strength and, taking advantage of the first moments of complete soundness of my mind, I wrote a testament in which, among other things, I conferred upon my friends the obligation, after my death, to publish certain of my letters. In this way, I meant . . . to redeem the futility of everything which, so far, has been printed by me, since in my correspondence, according to those to whom it was addressed, there is more that is needed by man than in any of my other writings."

True to his intolerant religious skepticism, Bielinsky accused Gogol of having introduced into his last book the theme of Christ; he actually did not see what bearing our Savior could have had upon subjects of a political nature. But to Gogol, religion could not be divorced from the destinies of mankind, and he was convinced that the collective progress of human societies is necessarily conditioned upon the moral improvement of the single individual, that indivisible atom of every social order.

Strictly political issues were never of any vital concern to Gogol, and perhaps this led him to acquiesce in Hegel's conciliatory postulate: "Everything that exists is reasonable; everything that is reasonable exists." But the Russian intelligentsia of the Forties', brought up on Feuerbach and the rosy dreams about some kind of a "new deal" along the lines of the French Revolution, was quite sure that politics exhausted the content of gregarious intercourse, and that nothing else was either important or worth striving for. These men took the Hannibal oath to destroy *quand mème* the Carthage of serfdom, even if this had to be achieved at the expense of a social cataclysm. Gogol's political indifference and his devotion to the Church irritated them and became the prime cause of their boisterous protest against *The Selected Portions.*

The progressives branded Gogol for his alleged desertion of their ranks. But if they had only taken the trouble to study Gogol's previous works with a little more intuitive insight, they would have soon discovered that religion always has been Gogol's dominant thought, so that the ecclesiastical topics descanted upon in *The Selected Portions* could not have been regarded as a sudden metamorphosis, or magnetic storm, in Gogol's creative life.

Where this volume differed from his earlier works was in the method of approach—all satirical colors having faded away from his palette: *The Reviser* and *The Dead Souls* were "laughter through tears"; *The Selected Portions* were tears without laughter, the sorrows of a pious soul lamenting the evils of a Christian world that had lost its Christ.

In *The Dead Souls,* Gogol was still trying to overcome his mental discord by some accord, formal though it be, with the great mass of human beings around him. In *The Selected Portions* he made a desperate, but vain, attempt to find relief in a pathological flight from reality; but he failed to break away from its iron clutches, and besides, the book proved the graveyard of his literary career. Abandoned by the general public, betrayed by his closest associates, calumniated by his enemies, Gogol found himself isolated from a community which neither understood nor pitied him.

Such was the concluding act, or the finale, of the turbulent contest between Poushkin and Father Mathew.

XV

In 1847, Gogol was feverishly preparing for a journey to the Holy Land. Year after year, he was looking forward to the cherished day when, at last, he would be granted the supreme happiness of treading the sacred soil of Palestine and praying at our Savior's Tomb. He attached great hopes to this solemn undertaking, and he felt that the proximity to the historical surroundings where Jesus Christ was born and where He sacrificed His priceless life for man's salvation, might resurrect his own spirit, helping him to regain his psychic balance.

As time drew nearer for the departure, Gogol's nerves, already shattered by the agonizing ambivalential struggle, began to give way. He was in a state of continuous oscillation: now he would be carried away by a passionate desire to leave home at once, and now, suddenly, he would grow cold and indifferent, an inner voice mockingly whispering to him—*"What's the use?"*

Afflicted by one of these recurrent moods, he wrote to Sheviriév:

> "I confess that often even this thought occurs to me: Why should I *now* be going to Jerusalem? In days past, I was at least mistaken about my own self; I thought I was a little better than I really am. . . . I felt that my prayers might mean

> something to God. . . . At present, I wonder if my arrival and my prayers would not amount to sacrilege? . . ."

In anticipation of the pilgrimage, Gogol kept besieging his friends with one and the same, almost monotonous, request—that prayers, and more prayers, be said for him. A letter to his mother sounds like an ailing outcry of a deeply afflicted soul:

> "We all are pilgrims in this world, and our existence here is but momentary. . . . I ask you to sing a Te Deum, and if possible, more than one (at places where they know how to pray better) for my happy journey. I feel that I have no strength to pray for myself. My forces are waning, my heart is stiff, and my soul is recreant. I implore help from all of you just as a perishing brother would be appealing to his kin. . . ."

Gogol's sojourn in Palestine proved a dismal failure: in Jerusalem he felt frigid and disheartened; the sandy sight of Judea left him unmoved; in Nazareth, it rained all day, "just as it would at a post station somewhere in Russia", and he returned home disillusioned, weary and defeated.

Shortly after he arrived in Moscow, he gave Joukovsky a candid account of his experiences:

> "Indeed,"—he said—"I undertook the journey to Palestine for the purpose of finding out for myself, and, as it were, perceiving with my own eyes, the extent of the stiffness of my heart. . . . I was deemed worthy to pass a night near the

> Tomb of our Savior; I was deemed worthy to take Holy Communion which had been placed on the Tomb itself . . . ,—and with all this, I did not grow better, even though all earthly things should have been burned within me, and only the heavenly things should have remained."

The same mood permeates one of Gogol's letters to Father Mathew:

> ". . . Truly, my situation is the most precarious of all, and redemption for me is more difficult than for any one else. . . . The Seducing Spirit is so close to me, and it has so often deceived me by impelling me to believe that I actually possessed that for which in reality I was merely striving! . . . Let me tell you that never was I so dissatisfied with the temper of my heart as when I was in Jerusalem. . . . I am dreading everything, because every minute I have the sensation as though I were moving along a dangerous path. In the distance I can discern the gleaming ray of salvation—the sacred symbol of *Love.* At present, I feel that faces of men are perhaps dearer to me than ever before, and it seems that now I am much more capable of loving than at any time in the past. . . . But God knows, even this may be a delusion; maybe in this case, too, the *Seducer* is playing his part. . . . Oh, generous soul, do please pray for me! . . ."

Clearly, this was no longer psychology, but psycho-pathology. Gogol's mind was suffering from a deep schism, the two hostile trains of thought running apart wider and wider like catheti of an angle extended into infinity: Poushkin vs. Father Mathew, God vs. Devil, Christ vs. Anti-Christ. The dividing line between the two extremes was lost, white and black merging into something colorless and grey. This was neither life nor death, but a painfully slow process of dying.

In a state such as this, neither Gogol nor anyone else could have been expected to yield much in the realm of creative inspiration. The maniacal ideas of Gogol finding no check, whether from within or from without, carried him away to the depths of boundless despair. Poesy, his only consolation, was taken away from him by the incessant dread that his life work, far from being a manifestation of Divine Providence, was but a sly trap set by the Enemy of Mankind for the purpose of enticing man.

Father Mathew once pronounced his anathema on both Poushkin and Gogol as a writer. He insisted that Gogol should openly renounce his allegiance to Poushkin, and the disconnected fragments of the Second Part of *The Dead Souls,* perhaps, just as much as *The Selected Portions,* were Gogol's concession to the crude and mortifying philosophy of Father Mathew. But even this sacrifice did not solve the problem, for by repudiating Poushkin, *eo ipso,* Gogol forswore not only the loftiest achievement of Russian culture, but his own artistic being as well, committing parricide and suicide with one and the same blow.

The tangle of Gogol's case was all the more tragic as Father Mathew, on whose instance the double crime had been wrought upon the dying poet, was a minister of the Church, which, in Gogol's earnest belief, was the sovereign judge in matters of both religion and ethics. And if the Church, the recognized instrumentality of Christ on earth, had condemned his greatest creations, the holy of holies of his soul, what was there left to either the man or the writer to enable him to continue his earthly existence?—To this Gogol could have given one answer only—*Nothing.*

After his sterile pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the history of Gogol's strange malady developed in leaps and bounds: In 1852, seized with a fit of mental agony, Gogol threw all his manuscripts into the flames of his fireplace. This grim *auto-da-fé* reduced to ashes the dreams and hopes and thoughts of a once great creative mind. The last thread which still tied him to the mystery of life was severed—the mystery of Death had begun.

Gogol was suffering from no physical pain or organic ailment. Every one of the physicians, who was called to examine Gogol during the last few months of his life, firmly declared that the condition of the patient's health was more or less normal.

Still, Gogol was dying.

Ten days before the end, Gogol said to a friend who came to visit him:

"I should be left alone. I know that I am dying."

During long weary hours and days he lay on his bed, immobile, yet awake, like a man in his death cell, counting the moments that still separated him from the somber Unknown. He refused to take food of any kind, and the sight of people with whom, in the past, he used to be on cordial terms, caused suffering and revulsion in the sinking martyr. He just lay there silent, probably with the fixed thought about the dark shadows which were slowly, but threateningly, gathering around his bedside. Even Holy Communion, which was given to him on the eve of his passing, left him indifferent and cold. By this time, he was no longer of this world.

Shortly before his curtain went down, he wrote on a slip of paper these irrational lines:

> "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. . . . Save me, the sinner, forgive me, Oh Lord, once more bind Satan by the mysterious force of the inscrutable Cross. . . ."

So, for the last time, the deceiving shadow of the Sinister Ghost flashed through the dimmed consciousness of Gogol, luring him into the Land of Eternal Darkness. . . .

The rest is silence. . . .

In Northern Italy, there still lives a mediæval legend of some pious monk who was once painting frescoes on the cathedral wall. Standing high upon a scaffold, he was adding, with his worshipping brush, the last artistic touches to the sacred image of the Holy Virgin. The sight of this devout work enraged the Devil, and wickedly he pushed the inspired painter off the wooden plank. Having lost his balance, in an instant the zealous padre would have been lying lifeless on the rock below, but at this same moment a miracle occurred: Extending Her benevolent hand, the Mother of God saved Her faithful servant from the mortal fall.

Gogol has given his dreams, his heart, his sparkling genius, nay—his whole life, to the noble task of exalting the Almighty so that Satan be brought into contempt. Slow and thorny was the ascent, hard and painful—the uphill struggle. Yet, with every added effort, he drew closer to the cherished goal; and there was a moment when it might have seemed that the conquering spirit would bring the poet in lasting harmony with his heavenly ideal. But suddenly, as though seduced by the Evil Ghost, Gogol lost his balance, and it so happened that there was no providential hand to prevent the fatal crash which left him lifeless, with his heart bleeding and his soul dead, on the barren rocks below.

DOSTOIEVSKY

DOSTOIEVSKY

October 30, 1821—January 28, 1881

Fëdor M. Dostoievsky was born on October 30, 1821, in Moscow, where his father, a physician at the Mary Hospital for the Poor, and a man of modest means himself, was then residing. Young Dostoievsky's education began rather early, when he was only five. His parents were very religious and imparted their simple, but fervent, faith to their son. In the evenings, the father used to read aloud to all the members of his family Karamzín's *History of the Russian State,* or some classical literary works. When Fëdor reached the age of ten, his father bought a small estate in the Province of Tula, not far from Moscow. There, the boy came in contact with rural Russia. At the age of fourteen, Fëdor entered a high school in Moscow, in which Michael, his elder brother, was also studying at the time. This was a model school, where even University professors were giving courses to the pupils of higher grades. In 1837, Dostoievsky lost his mother, to whom he was tenderly devoted. Shortly after her death, Fëdor Dostoievsky matriculated at the Engineering School in St. Petersburg. This, too, was an excellently appointed educational institution which was then under the patronage of Grand Duke Michael, the brother of Emperor Nicholas I. Even during that early period, Dostoievsky began to evince gloomy and hypochondriac traits of his character. He took no interest in his school mates, keeping aloof from their entertainments and distractions. The six years which he spent in the Engineering School contributed much to his mental development, particularly because he spent a great deal of time on systematic reading, and, generally, self-education. In 1839, Dostoievsky's father died, and this was the second severe shock in Fëdor's young life. After graduation, Dostoievsky entered Government service, but all his leanings lay in the field of literary work. In 1845, he completed his first novel, *Poor People,* which, a few months later, was printed in *The St. Petersburg Collection,* a magazine which was published by N. Nekrassov, a famous Russian poet. This first work of Dostoievsky's was greeted with enthusiasm by the Russian literary world, and won the approval of Bielinsky, whose fame as a critic was then at its zenith. The success which accompanied Dostoievsky's literary début brought him in personal contact with Bielinsky and that radical circle of which the critic was the recognized leader. The novelist started frequenting these men, with whose political views he had no sympathy whatsoever. It was then that he made the acquaintance of one Petrashevsky, a revolutionist, whose activities came to the notice of the police under Nicholas I. On April 23, 1849, Petrashevsky and all the members of his circle, including Dostoievsky, were arrested. Dostoievsky was accused of having read aloud at one of the Petrashevsky meetings, Bielinsky's notorious letter to Gogol. After seven months of confinement in the SS. Peter and Paul Fortress, the Petrashevsky trial came to an end. All of the defendants were sentenced to death, and on December 22, 1849, they were all brought for execution to the Semëňovsky Square in St. Petersburg. However, the death penalty was commuted by the Emperor, and Dostoievsky was sentenced to four years of hard labor in Siberia. On March 2, 1854, he was released from prison, after which, during several years, he served as a private in the Seventh Siberian Battalion. He returned to European Russia in 1859. Two years later, he published his *Dead House,* which revealed the full power of his analytical genius. In 1864, appeared his *Records from the Underworld,* a novel which may be regarded as the nucleus of many profound ideas which were subsequently developed in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *Insulted and Injured* (1867), *The Idiot* (1868), *The Possessed* (1871–1872), and his crowning work, *Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880). Dostoievsky expounded his political ideas in his *Writer's Diary* (1876, 1877). Even today, the prolific literary heritage of Dostoievsky is not fully appreciated. If Poushkin is called the Raphael of Russian literature, Dostoievsky should be recognized as its Michelangelo. Dostoievsky's fame reached its climax in 1880, after his brilliant speech at the unveiling of the Poushkin monument in Moscow. Dostoievsky died in St. Petersburg, January 28, 1881.

I

> *Two souls—alas—are living in my breast. . . .*
>
> GOETHE

IT WAS Buffon who coined the classical phrase—*"le style est tout l'homme"*. Indeed, every genuine artist does have a manner of his own; a method in craftsmanship which is peculiarly his; something singular in the technique of weaving sounds and blending colors; some preciously different touch of the brush or melody of the rhyme that distinguishes him from other masters,—a unique mode of expression, an unrepeatable way of translating his hopes, moulding his dreams and carving his phantasms into superb and lasting forms where the creator and his creation are one, an insoluble and unbroken whole.

Dostoievsky is all in his style—verbose, hyperbolic, unruly and rebellious. He masses his prolific material, ostensibly with no concern about any fixed rules of architectonics or crystallized laws of literary counterpoint. He hurls his scenes and descriptions, his fiery monologues and furious dialogues, with almost hysterical haste. Countless plots, intrigues, scandals, crimes, pathological outbursts of anger, violence and passion, are hustled and crowded and tossed together, as though without preconceived plan or scheme, in grotesque combinations and incongruent interplay. Dostoievsky's Universe, like that agitated sea in Schiller's *Diver,* "bubbles, and rages, and hisses, and seethes;" * it is never quiet, never at peace, never in a state of satisfied repose.

With disdain he discards the ceremonious etiquette of the conventional novel, and his are torrential confessions of afflicted hearts and ill minds. Dostoievsky holds his readers in a state of uninterrupted tension; he hypnotizes them by the magic of his spiritual might; he drags them through the glowing furnace of his own torments, and no one can escape the iron clasp of his grim visions.

The mathematical precision of Poushkin's prose; the epic calm of Tolstoy's canvases; the dispassionate objectiveness of Goncharóv's realism; the water color grace of Turgenev's dreamy landscapes,—all this is utterly alien to Dostoievsky.

He has no time to chisel his sentences and gloss his style. In the course of his tempestuous narrative, he is driven from one cataclysm to another, from crisis to crisis, and he knows no musical pauses, no pensive intervals, no placid intermezzos. His is a world of tragic contrasts, devoid of soft tones, soothing half-shades and chromatic modulations. The atmosphere in all his books is suffocating, overcharged with perilous temptations and inner unrest. Just like the novelist himself, his heroes live amidst chaos and storms, caught betwixt sharp discords, always threatened by avalanches of conflicting ideas and crushed under the load of their eternal doubts.

---

* *Und es wallet, und siedet, und brauset, und zischt.*

Whereas Poushkin's poesy is a divine symphony of sound and sun and song, enchantingly light, crystally pure and irresistibly luring,—Dostoievsky's manner is heavy, feverish, unbalanced and involved. One even feels that it is not always easy for him to incarnate his deep thoughts into flowing words and living symbols. As he himself observed once:

> "Long discussions flash through our brains as mere sensations without translating themselves into the human tongue. . . .",

and many years later, he added:

> "Perhaps in no European language is it so difficult to write as in the Russian."

But unlike Gogol of the last period, Dostoievsky—not the man but the artist—does not suffer from ideational poverty or creative emaciation; on the contrary, as in the case of Beethoven, he is tormented by an overabundance of ideas and images, which he desperately struggles to force into the Procrustean bed of some settled form.

Poushkin, the Raphael, and Dostoievsky, the

Michelangelo of Russian imaginative literature—how strangely different they are! And yet, the physical law of attraction, so apparent in magnetic phenomena, seems to be equally valid in the world of psychic reality: minds functioning in a manner altogether divergent, at times, rather unexpectedly, become drawn to each other, and, despite their centrifugal polarity, some mysterious force tends to hold them in a state of clutching cohesion. This is certainly true of Dostoievsky's strange longing for Poushkin:

> "During his entire life,"—says V. Rózanov, one of Dostoievsky's ablest biographers—"ever since his tender years, he has been cherishing a peculiar cult for Poushkin, even though in his troubled, stormy and anguished nature, not only was there nothing akin to the calm and lucid Poushkin, but he was . . . the latter's antithesis, being closer to Gogol, and perhaps still closer to Lermontov. . . ."

This devotion to Poushkin is a classical example of a situation where *les extrémités se touchent*. Psychologically, Dostoievsky's sentiment grew out of his intense thirst for inner peace: amidst the chaos of painful conflicts and turbulent brain combats, he looked to Poushkin with love and hope as to his guardian angel who was always ready to shield him from the dangerous allurements of a restlessly searching and never satisfied intellect.

The enchanting melodies of Poushkin's poesy soothed the aches of Dostoievsky's heart, overwhelmed by harrowing doubts and afflicted with deep sorrows. To him, the Russian poet's rhymes were like gentle and lulling chords of some angelic lyre; he listened eagerly to those distant sounds, seeking—alas! so often in vain—to solve the mystery of serene harmony, that "great secret" of Poushkin, to which our novelist so eloquently alluded in his famous Moscow speech.

To Dostoievsky, then, in the same measure as to Gogol, the genius of Poushkin was a complement of something that he himself sadly lacked and desperately needed.

Still, psychology does not give the full story: contrary to Gogol, the range of Dostoievsky's intellectual diapason extends far beyond Russian, or any other, provincialism. Much as his characters are genuinely Russian characters, grown into Russian soil and bred on Russian tradition—they invariably carry within them the germ of some cosmic idea, which overlaps all geographical frontiers and transgresses all barriers of space and time, projecting itself into infinity and becoming part of some eternal truth. At this point, the parabolic itinerary of Dostoievsky's thought crosses the wide sunlit lane traversed by Poushkin, in whose creations the element of "Main Street" is scarcely more than a necessary milieu for the expression of the universally real.

> ". . . Poushkin"—observed Dostoievsky himself —"will have for the masses an historical significance, since he will be conceived by them as one of the foremost prophets of *universal* principles, which in him, found such a compassionate and broad interpretation. . . . With the generally human sentiment, to which the Russian people are so manifestly prone, they will become acquainted primarily through Poushkin. . . . They will comprehend him . . . and through his poesy, they will learn to understand themselves."

This passage from Dostoievsky's *Diary* is quite typical of his whole philosophy. According to him, the Russian people are distinct from any other nation precisely in that they are endowed with the unique faculty of absorbing in their soul the ideals and dreams of all peoples, finding in the vast multitude of the heterogeneous longings and leanings one homogeneous denominator, common to every land and every nation.

Having perceived in Poushkin, and no one but Poushkin, this basic Russian characteristic, Dostoievsky unhesitatingly acclaimed him as Russia's greatest national genius. This is why, in the course of his Moscow speech, he exclaimed:

> "Nay, I firmly contend that no poet possessed a universal sense of susceptibility equal to that of Poushkin; nor is it merely a question of susceptibility as such, but its astounding profundity and the gift of reincarnating his spirit into the spirit of alien peoples—an embodiment which is al-

> most flawless, and for this reason—miraculous. . . . It is a trait which we find only in Poushkin, and in this sense . . . he is an extraordinary, unheard of, and in my view,—prophetic phenomenon. . . ."

This was a super-rational, or intuitive, gift with which Poushkin was endowed in the highest degree, and its hypnotic influence upon Dostoievsky left an ineradicable mark on the general trends of his mystic thought.

There was still another aspect in Poushkin which continuously lured Dostoievsky: he suspected that, in the last analysis, Poushkin's was an equilibrium of tempered, but stormy passions, tranquillity of a slumbering volcano which suddenly may awake, casting out of its dark gorge all-devouring and flaming lava.—For wasn't the creator of the *Coq d'Or* also the inspired Falconette of a challenging poem dedicated to the Bronze Horseman? Wasn't Poushkin an ardent admirer of Peter—that demigod of passionate action, titanic force and elemental will—who with his iron bridle, "threw on her haunches Russia Great?" And didn't the placid Poushkin, in his *Feast During the Plague,* remind man of the seductive power of the Dreadful?

> "There's fascination in a war,
> In ocean's mighty splash and roar—
> 'Midst nightly gloom—'long tempests' lane,
> O'er grisly gulfs that threaten death,

In an Arabian hurricane,
And in the plague's pernicious breath."

In his creative meditations, Dostoievsky himself was constantly hovering over the dark abyss of the human soul. Unlike Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who tried to reach truth by slow *ascent* to the towering heights of what he conceived to be human Wisdom,—Dostoievsky sought to grasp the evasive substance of the Absolute by unceasing penetration and venturous *descent* into the somber depths of the spirit; by tireless analysis and self-analysis, dwelling upon the things which, though unquestionably real, remain unnoticed in every-day intercourse. It was there—in the unexplored realms of the psyche, that he traced the very sources of our everlasting discords; there, as it were, he had been present at the birth of evil; there, he discerned the hidden seeds of crime planted in everybody's conscience, and those undercurrents which nourish the roots of impending punishment symbolizing the idea of eternal retribution for a moral transgression, for a sin, though not committed, yet silently contemplated and secretly desired.

It is also in those cavernous spaces that he detected the bacilli of the creature's pathogenic dread of finality as opposed to his instinctive craving for eternity,—his self-assertion as a means of warding off the threat of his ultimate effacement by the stern workings of some high law, which can be neither comprehended nor should be disturbed, but which sometimes is the cause of man's rebellion against the Maker of all things.

II

THERE seems to be much doubt among modern neurologists whether any definite line can be traced between normal functions of the human mind and its ill, or deranged, manifestations. After all, it is a question if there is such a thing as "psychic normalcy". Dostoievsky's works most decidedly go to prove that psychology can hardly be divorced from psycho-pathology, while oftentimes even the so-called sane operations of our intellect touch upon, and become merged with, its insane, or at least, borderline states.

Long before Freud and Jung had given birth to the present-day psycho-analytical vogue, Dostoievsky found that the Dionysian theme occupies an important, if not predominant, place in our mental life. Of course, his cold delvings into sex had little in common with Poushkin's amorous experiences, fiery and passionate though they were: To Poushkin, the eternal lover and the Don Juan, the masculine leitmotiv *"Das Ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan"* was just as natural as any other law of Nature; he accepted this fundamental instinct as something absolutely granted, and the sensation of being caught in "the seductive nets of Cypris", to him, was fully satisfying, in fact, it was a feeling of captivity which he has been craving for.

Still less affinity is there between Gogol's frigid asceticism—for Gogol was freakishly asexual—and Dostoievsky: his heroes, both men and women, are intensely laboring over the libido subject. Again, here, it is neither physiology nor psychology, but mostly *psychopathia sexualis*—morbid dreams and hazardous revelations, which the author exhibits to, and discusses with, the reader with such astounding frankness as would make Wedekind's notorious *Awakening of Spring* seem an innocent bedtime story.

We read, for instance, in the *Diary from the Underworld,* a confession such as this:

> "At times . . . suddenly I would sink into a dark, underground, disgusting—even not debauch, but petty depravity; the trivial passions in me were sharp and burning as a result of my constant pathological irritability. The impulses were of an hysterical nature, with tears and convulsions. . . . Besides, anguish would rise in me, and I would experience a paroxysmal yearning for contradictions and contrasts, and so I would start my depraved practices. . . . Even at that time I carried in my soul the underground. I used to be terribly afraid of being seen, or met, or recognized by anyone. . . ."

Dostoievsky's preoccupation with the enigma of sex preëminently was a sensual one, which in *Brothers Karamazov,* assumes an all-pervading significance.

The philosophy of sensualism, of which Dmitry Karamazov is a faithful adept, is professed, in all its vulgar obscenity, by Fëdor Pavlovich, his father. The old sinner's relations with Grúshenka appear as the apogee of spider-like voluptuousness. With cynical candor he expounds his debased credo in a lecture which, over a pony of brandy, he is giving to his children:

> "To my thinking. . . . Ah, you boys! You children, little sucking-pigs! To my thinking. . . . I never thought a woman ugly in my life—that's my rule! Can you understand that?—How could you understand it? You've milk in your veins, not blood. You're not out of your shells yet. My rule has been that you can always find something devilishly interesting in every woman that you wouldn't find in any other. Only, one must know how to find it, that's the point! That's a talent! To my mind, there are no ugly women. The very fact that she is a woman is half the battle . . . But how could you understand that? Even in *vieilles filles,* even in them, you may discover something that makes you simply wonder that men have been such fools as to let them grow old without noticing them. Barefooted girls or unattractive ones—these you must take by surprise. Didn't you know that? You must astound them till they're dazzled, upset, ashamed that such a gentleman should fall in love with such a little slut."

Still more acute is the carnal lust in Svidrigaílov, the most devious among all characters in *Crime and Punishment.*

Many of Dostoievsky's heroes have fallen victims of the most degraded forms of eroticism: with all self-restraint lost and all mechanisms of self-defense shattered, they are swept into the throes of corruption, and, constricted in its suffocating clasp, they hopelessly sink into the slough of vice and sin.

But Dostoievsky discovered other seemingly opposite aspects in this field: perhaps for the first time in the history of modern literature, the Russian novelist, in his *Nétochka Nezvánova,* for instance, has dared to bring up the exceptionally delicate subject of lesbianism. The story of Nétochka's half-infantile, but unmistakably sensual, affection for Princess Katia, though treated with extraordinary artistic tact and caution, would furnish highly provocative and informative material even to such expert investigators of sexual anomalies as Forel and Krafft-Ebing.

The searchlight of Dostoievsky's genius also threw its piercing ray into that incomprehensible and frantic chastity, which, as it were, "seduces" men like the "idiot", Prince Mishkin, and Alyosha Karamazov, to asceticism, despite their innate and ardent longing for woman's love.

The intensely intriguing type of half-sinful saints or half-saintly sinners has been conceived in Russian literature for the first time by Poushkin: his "poor knight" (*Scene of Chivalresque Times*) becomes afflicted with the malady of inhibition, as a result of an unusual psychic experience.

> "Once he had a mystic vision
> Which the mind cannot express,
> And that dream strange caused a scission
> In his heart filled with distress.
> Since that day, devoured by fire,
> His poor soul was all distraught,
> *And no woman did inspire*
> *Him with love or tender thought.*
> Full of pious veneration
> For the dream to him revealed,
> He inscribed a dedication,
> '*A.M.D.*' on his proud shield."

Though utterly indifferent to earthly women, Poushkin's knight feels an exalted passion for the Holy Virgin ("*A*mo *M*atrem *D*ei") ; he traces the fatal initials with his own blood, as though seeking, by means of this humble offering, to propitiate the Heavenly Queen. This abnormal outburst of amatory emotion over a religious vision, in a man ostensibly frigid, slowly kills the knight, and

> "Always silent, always doleful,
> He became and died insane."

Poushkin only touched upon this cryptic mystery, merely glided over a dark gulf,—and then, in his usual manner, serenely turned to other, lighter motives. However, Dostoievsky's keenedged analytical mind surmised the perilous potentialities of the "poor knight's" ravings: Prince Mishkin, the partly sane epileptic, reveals the full and immensely intricate picture of sexual ambivalency not only in his oscillations between Aglaya, the beautiful girl who becomes infatuated with him, and Nastasia Philípovna, the irresistibly seductive courtesan, but more so, in his basic query about sex in general—in the torturous indecision over the physical side of love as distinguished from, and frequently opposed to, its platonic phase.

In Dostoievsky's *Idiot,* Don Juan is shown in a state of bitter contest with Don Quixote. Perhaps, the painful schism in Mishkin, like that in Poushkin's "poor knight", is the reverberation of some inexplicable inner shock, or sudden "mystic vision", which Kirilov, one of "the possessed", describes as something "higher than love", "an *awful"* feeling that is *"terribly* dear and such a joy", and which the "idiot" calls "moments of supreme harmony", immediately preceding the epileptic attack:

> "Only five seconds—more than five seconds the soul cannot endure—striking like lightning through the dark night of the unconscious, *for which it is worth while to surrender the whole life."*

And further, analyzing the nervous trance at the moment of the *grand mal* itself, Dostoievsky observes:

> "That second, of course, is unbearable. . . . What difference does it make that this is only abnormal tension, if the result itself, if the instant of deepest sensation . . . appears to create supreme harmony, beauty, yielding an inimitable and hitherto unsuspected feeling of completeness, measure, reconciliation and exaltedly devout fusion with the most sublime synthesis of life."

Is it not possible that both the Knight's and Mishkin's aversion for woman as the generic incarnation of sex, is a complex precipitated by something that was conceived by them during "the five seconds", striking like lightning, or only at that very last moment when, in the ecstatic confluence of flesh and spirit, all contradictions become obliterated, all contrasts melt in the flames of divine passion, and with them falls the primordial antagonism between *M* and *F,* male and female, the two principles which are, and always will be, simultaneously attracted to, and repulsed by, each other?

Who knows?

As Edgar Poe said:

> "They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their grey visions, they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awakening, to find that they have been upon the verge of the Great Secret."

Dostoievsky, the world's greatest realist and most daring dreamer of dreams, pitilessly—with almost sadistic delight—holds his victims, the readers of his works, on the brink of the dreadful, the impossible, the repulsive. But in his rovings through the labyrinth of man's underworld—to use the apocalyptic term, "in the depths of Satan"—he suddenly detects the loftiest manifestations of the spirit, and ideals of sublime beauty; amidst turpitude of decay, in the desolate wastes of abomination, behind the diabolical mask of Evil—such chastity and delicate fragrance as hardly can be encountered in the creations of any other writer; such seraphic innocence as perhaps has never been even suspected by the most rigorous puritans and professional preachers of bourgeois virtue and standardized morality.

And so, the strange two-faced Janus of modern times displays now the wicked grimace of the Devil, now the holy smile of a Francis d'Assise.

III

> "I WAS born"—says Dostoievsky—"in a pious Russian family. As far back as I can remember myself, I also recall my parents' love for me. In our family, we had known the Gospels almost from tender childhood. I was only ten when I was already acquainted with all the principal events in Russian history from Karamzín, whom, in the evenings, our father used to read aloud to us. To

> me, each one of my visits to the Kremlin and the Moscow cathedrals was a solemn event."

There was an impress of orderliness, good mien and sternness upon the whole life outlook evolved by that typical middle class family of old time Russia; the world at large seemed to concern it little, and young Dostoievsky's mental development pursued a course independent of any influences emanating from the outside. When he had reached the age of ten, his father, a resident of Moscow, bought a small estate in the Province of Tula, and, from that time on, the Dostoievskys would be spending there the Spring and Summer months. This contact with rural Russia and her peasantry ingrained in Dostoievsky a sentiment of profound attachment to the common Russian, with his deeply religious psychology.

Among the humble village folk he perceived, as though, a prolongation of the things which, as a child, he had witnessed in the fold of his own family: theirs also was a simple and unhesitating faith, not so much in some abstract Supreme Being, as in concrete Orthodoxy, with its churches and priests and dogmas—a credulous devotion to the whole gamut of religious rituals which used to form both a necessary and revered part of their daily lives; theirs was that kind of creed which is anything but the fruit of the prohibited Tree of Knowledge, or sophisticated theological discussions and half-doubting speculations of philosophy, politely inviting reason to recognize its own limitations and struggling for some sort of a complement that would throw a secure bridge between the fields of the Knowable and the vast domain of the Unknown. In those days the average Russian held strong religious beliefs without attempting to put these to tests of erudition or queries of "critique", abiding in this respect by the dictate of Christ:

> "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven",

that covenant of Our Lord, the ultimate wisdom of which was realized—unfortunately, too late—by Gogol's sinking mind.

These experiences of early childhood gradually moulded in Dostoievsky the firm conviction of his oneness with the Russian people, whom he refused to treat as a mere conglomeration of racially or religiously interrelated individuals, herded together by some caprice of fate: rather, they were conceived by him as a huge reservoir of spiritual power, as a living organism vested with the definite historical mission of showing mankind the way out of the impasse reached by Western civilization. Dostoievsky's was an unshaken faith in Russia, whose advancement and cultural achievements, he felt, could and should not be segregated from the growth of the Christian ideal and its final crystallization in the mystic soul of his nation.

Dostoievsky—even more so than Gogol—was inclined to regard the moral problem not only as part of the religious concept, but, indeed, as religion itself, which unites, enlightens and purifies the fraternal community of the Christian Church.

Nor was Dostoievsky satisfied with those conventional ceremonies which are exhibited in chilly "Sunday attendances" of people all dressed up in their cutaways and silk hats, drowsily yawning in comfortable pews, for he knew that unless religion was a passion, it was apt to degenerate into a profession, into a mere ritual, perhaps even more degrading than the vacuity of atheism, or futility of pantheism which, after all, is but a courteous way of bidding farewell to the idea of God.

All the more strange appears the mental twist which, it is said, caused a metamorphosis, if not a revolution, in Dostoievsky's "holy of holies" shortly after his graduation at the Engineering College (1843). Now, these are the facts: His first novel, *Poor People,* was published in 1846. Notwithstanding its stylistic flaws and verbosity, the work was acclaimed by Bielinsky as one of the most remarkable creations of Russian literary genius. "Do you, yourself", he said to Dostoievsky, "do you realize *what* you have done?"—Coming from such a judge, the verdict was next to a prognosis of the young author's future fame. His friends went so far as to compare him with Gogol whose glory was still unrivalled and unchallenged.

The noisy success which accompanied the novel, naturally, brought Dostoievsky in personal contact with the eminent critic and that radical circle of which he was the recognized center. The débutant writer started frequenting these men, whose philosophical and political orientation was cardinally different from his own. This was particularly true of Petrashevsky—a prominent figure in the revolutionary sets of those days—whose aggressive views came to the notice of the vigilant police under Nicholas I. The members of the Petrashevsky group were busily engaged in practicing atheism and pondering over socialism; some of the more "practical" among them, were even dreaming of Fourier's phalansteries and similar utopian projects. At their meetings, rabid papers and pamphlets of every description were eagerly read and passionately discussed.

On April 23, 1849, Petrashevsky and every one of his friends, including Dostoievsky, were arrested. Such was the end of the "Petrashevsky conspiracy." Our novelist, among other things, was accused of having read at one of the revolutionary seances Bielinsky's notorious letter to Gogol.

Dostoievsky's incarceration was a most paradoxical affair which should be looked upon as a classic in the voluminous history of police blunders both within and without Russia: To begin with, he had no sympathy for Bielinsky's apostate views; in fact, the two disagreed on every point that dealt with religion or entailed purely political issues. Even many years after Bielinsky's death, Dostoievsky, with sharp irritation, recalled some of his controversies with the man who dared to call Gogol "Apostle of Ignorance" and "Preacher of the Whip".

> "This man" (Bielinsky)—exclaimed Dostoievsky—"abused to me Christ, but at the same time he was never able to compare himself and all other movers of the world with Christ. He could never see how much petty self-love, wickedness, impatience, irritability, meanness, but principally, self-love, there was in him and in them. He never said to himself: What shall we substitute for Him?—Is it possible that we will offer ourselves as His proxies, even though we are so disgusting?—Nay, he never gave thought to the fact that he was wicked; he was satisfied with himself in the highest degree, and this was due to his personal fetid and infamous stolidity."

Still less was Dostoievsky's credo akin to that of Petrashevsky, for revolutionary reveries have never made any appeal to him who, later, carved *The Possessed,* and who, in his much debated *Writer's Diary,* so fervently expounded the doctrine of enlightened conservatism. Did not Dostoievsky state once that, to him, life in an Icarian commune, or in a socialistic armory, would be more abhorrent than in the galleys?—Indeed, there was nothing of a Jacques Bonhomme or a Bakounin in the Russian author who, even in that early period of his, was a true adept of the Slavophile philosophy with its firmly imbedded faith in the socionomic and superclass character of the Russian Czar's power.

The question may well be asked why did he, then, mix with politicians of the type which he himself strongly condemned?—Today this riddle seems simple of solution, since we know now that nothing was more fascinating to Dostoievsky than the fermentations of the human mind, no matter how queer, and that throughout his entire life, he has been pursuing, with almost maniacal perseverance, his quests into the vicissitudes of the human psyche.

Nor is this all: Dostoievsky, the over-sensitive heart reader, was fully aware of the fact that *one's own* inner world, intricate though it be, is, of necessity, but a chromatic spectrum, in which all colors are plainly visible and easily determinable by mere introspection. But the things which interested him most were the chemical and thermal spectra of *other* people's ideas and emotions, where only the dark ray of master analysis sometimes may reveal the infra-red and ultra-violet fields, imperceptible even under the most powerful microscope. Precisely in these regions, carefully concealed from an observer's curiosity, Dostoievsky discovered all the clandestine longings, morbid states, temperamental crises and risky attitudes, secretly dwelling, or merely unconsciously slumbering, in man's ego.

The intensely inquisitive method of Dostoievsky could be likened to a dispassionate *ante mortem,* whose aim it is to dissect and decompose a psychic constitution, reducing it to its prime and indivisible atoms. In this way, the experiences of his own immensely complex and effervescent soul were widened and deepened, increased and multiplied, by the precious data which he detected in the hidden folds of his patients' hearts—and who to him was not a patient?—until finally, he succeeded in developing a clairvoyant faculty that was unprecedented and remains unique in world literature.

Yet these plain facts were beyond the shallow comprehension of Dostoievsky's political censors: To them, for instance, a man with Marx's *Manifesto* on his desk was about as bad as Marx himself, and they would be wondering, why should a well-intentioned citizen indulge in absorbing the Red Bible unless he himself were in sympathy with revolutionary mischief?—This was the Alpha and Omega of *their* wisdom, which came near to depriving mankind of one of its mightiest geniuses, and which actually did crown his noble head with the thorns of a martyr.

IV

PENDING the trial, Dostoievsky was committed to the SS. Peter and Paul Fortress, where he remained over seven months. His mental state during that difficult period is best revealed through the letters which he wrote while in prison to Michael Dostoievsky, his brother. In one of these he stated:

> "I can tell you nothing encouraging concerning my health. . . . I feel pains in my chest which I never had before. Besides, sensibility has increased, especially at night time when I have long and hideous dreams. Of late, I have had a continuous sensation of the floor moving under my feet and of my sitting in the room as though I were in a steamship cabin. From this I judge that my nerves are in a poor condition. In the past, when such nervous spells used to visit me, I took advantage of them in order to write, for in a state such as this, one always writes better and more; but now I am not indulging in this for fear I shall finally undermine my health."

Three weeks later:

> "I received, brother dear, your letter and the books (Shakespeare, the Bible . . .), and the money. . . . I wish to thank you for all this. The difficult Autumn months are approaching, and with them come my hypochondriac moods. The sky is already frowning, and yet, its bright scrap, which I can see from my cell, is the guarantee of my health and good disposition. Nevertheless, up to this day, I have been living and feeling well. . . . I expected worse things, and now I can see that within me there is so much vitality that it simply cannot be burned out. . . . It is now five months, or so, that I have been existing on my

> own assets, that is, on my brain, and nothing else. So far, the engine has not fallen apart, and it goes on functioning. But continuous thinking, and thinking alone, with no impressions from the outside to regenerate and assist the thought—this is trying! . . . Everything from within me went to my head, and from the head—to thought, absolutely everything, but, in spite of this, the brain work grows more intense every day. . . . I was reading over the books which you sent me. I am particularly grateful for Shakespeare. How did you guess? . . ."

Finally, after the weary months of waiting, the Petrashevsky trial came to an end, and every one of the defendants was sentenced to death.

This horrible verdict was not put into effect.

On the twenty second day of December, 1849, Dostoievsky wrote to his brother:

> "Today . . . we were taken to the Semëńovsky Square. There, the death sentences were read to all of us. We were permitted to kiss the cross; then the swords were broken over our heads and the death clothes were put on us (white shirts). After that, three of us were placed in front of a post for execution. I was standing sixth in line, and we were called out by three's, so that I was in the second group, and not more than one minute remained to live. I started thinking of you, brother, and yours. At the last moment, you alone were in my mind. Only then I grasped how much I love you, my dear . . . ! I had the time to embrace Plescheev and Dourov, who stood next to me, bidding them farewell. Suddenly, retreat was

> sounded; those who were tied to the post were taken back, and it was announced to us that His Imperial Majesty grants us our lives. Then the real verdicts were read. Palm alone was acquitted and was returned to the Army with the same rank."

Dostoievsky's sentence was commuted to four years of forced labor in Siberia, after which he had to serve for a long period as a private in the Russian Army.

On Christmas Eve of 1849, before starting to the place of his exile, Dostoievsky was given the permission to see his brother, to whom he spoke these characteristic words:

> "In the galley, too, not beasts but human beings are dwelling; perhaps, they are better and more worthy than I myself."

In this brief remark is condensed Dostoievsky's whole inner nature—his profound, gentle and great soul—which not only enabled him to endure the agony of convict labor, so unjustly inflicted upon him, but brought him back to life with a radiant mind full of wisdom and a heart palpitating in unison with the mournful music of human sighs.

The shock of the experience at the death post and the years which Dostoievsky spent in prison furnished him with abundant material of a kind which writers are but rarely able to obtain. With his inherent gift for analytical reasoning, Dostoievsky made the utmost of both his introspective observations and first-hand studies of men with whom he had so little in common and yet so much to share.

Long after, in *The Idiot,* he gave a heartbreaking and tragically truthful account of the confused and conflicting feelings of a man sentenced to die, just before the moment when he is about to ascend the scaffold of the guillotine. There is hardly anything in European literature that can be placed on quite the same level as the few pages of Prince Mishkin's narrative, where he describes the successive psychic states of the condemned, who knows that in a few fleeting seconds his tie with life will be forever severed. Compared with the picture drawn by Dostoievsky, even Andreev's sad but masterful *Story About the Seven that Were Hanged* appears somewhat artificial and far-fetched.

With the punctiliousness of a medical expert, Dostoievsky records:

> "When weakness would begin to overcome him, the priest would quickly, silently, with a hasty gesture, press to his very lips a small four pointed cross,—he kept doing this every second. And just as soon as the cross touched the lips, his eyes would open, and again, for a few seconds, he seemed to be revived, as it were, and his feet would start moving. He kissed the cross avidly and hurriedly, as though hastening not to forget

> to grab something for reserve, just so he could have it afterward, but it is doubtful whether at this moment he was experiencing any religious feeling. So it lasted up to the very block. Strangely, in these last seconds, one rarely faints. On the contrary, the mind is terribly alert and works hard—hard, at full speed, like an engine in motion. I imagine that different thoughts must smite the brain—broken up thoughts—perhaps, even funny and irrelevant ones. . . . And yet, one is cognizant of, and remembers, everything. There is one spot that cannot be forgotten, and it is impossible to faint, and everything moves and revolves around this one point. To think only that this continues up to the very last quarter of a second when the head is already on the block, and it waits, and *knows,* and suddenly it will hear from above the sound of rasping iron! This one will surely hear! If I were lying there, I would be purposely listening, and I know I would hear it. . . ."

Obviously, this is the story of the author's own experience on the Semëńovsky Square, when he stood facing the firing squad, sure, beyond the slightest doubt, that in sixty, now in forty, now—only in thirty, seconds, lead will pierce his quivering heart.

This is the kind of thing which can never be forgotten; it sinks into the innermost depths of the soul, and there "it waits", like that head on the block, ready to strike like a thunderbolt, flashing through the brain like lightning, and the dreadful past is suddenly revived with such sharp and tragic clarity that one has the sensation as if he were once more gazing at close range upon the marble and silent Face of Death.

The whole drama of the trial with its disastrous finale had a singular effect upon the nervous system of Dostoievsky: it produced, as it were, a forcible inversion of his mind, deepening his self-cognitive proclivity to a degree where, for a while, it seemed that the subjective process of inward concentration upon the microcosm of his own "I" would atrophy all perceptive functions by which external phenomena are objectively registered and integrated in our consciousness. Often a mental contortion such as this, particularly in a person of an epileptic constitution—and Dostoievsky was an epileptic—is fraught with dangerous, even fatal, developments leading to obsessional states and outright insanity.

Fortunately, hard labor and dreary exile did not crush the mighty Russian. Here, Hahnemann's principle *"Similia similibus curantur"* did prove valid: one perplexing experience was overcome and cured by a similar one. Our novelist emerged out of the catacombs of humiliation and shame fortified in his fundamental beliefs, tempered in the fire of his superhuman suffering, all set to discharge his volcanic energies in the majestic act of creation,—in moulding, casting and carving the undying images of his accursed heroes, overfilled and overloaded with his own raging passions and explosive dreams.

V

MUCH as prison life in Siberia was monotonous and trying, it unfolded to Dostoievsky a vast world of novel ideas, intricate situations and unsuspected attitudes. Above all, to him, the "dead house" became an immense laboratory in which his searching spirit was able to experiment and assay the whole range of feelings, sentiments and moods, forcibly thrust into the narrow space circumscribed by the solid walls of an obsolete penitentiary.

No outsider, not even a prison guard or a warden, is able to grasp the things which are on the criminal's mind: the most studious observer, so long as he is not one of the inmates, will never fully penetrate into the confused mentality of beings that once were men, and who, despite their widely divergent personal histories, leanings and ambitions, have one trait in common—all of them being social refuse, déclassés, outcasts of a society which itself is largely responsible for their shackles.

Temporarily, fate made Dostoievsky sink to the wretched level of an ordinary galley-slave, just as the rest of his "companions", so that, to him, the tortures of the human Inferno became his own pathetically real experience:

> "I remember"—recounts Dostoievsky—"entering the convict prison one December evening, as night was falling. . . . An under-officer with large mustaches opened to me the gate of this strange house, where I was to remain so many years, to endure so many emotions, and of which I could not have formed even an approximate idea, if I had not gone through them. Thus, for example, could I ever have imagined the poignant and terrible suffering of never being alone, even for one minute. . . . Working under escort in the barracks, together with two hundred 'companions',—never alone, never."

But it is significant that just as soon as freedom was granted to Dostoievsky, at once a barrier arose between him and the felons in whose midst he had lived so long.

> "Most of the poor fellows"—remarks Dostoievsky—"seemed to be convinced so strongly that, for them, I was already a man changed by what was coming, that they could feel scarce anything else. They knew that I had friends in the town; that I was going away at once to *gentlemen;* that I would be sitting at their table as their equal. . . . I, too, was a gentleman now. Some turned their backs on me, and made no reply to my parting words. I think that I also saw looks of aversion on some faces."

Here, in prison, Dostoievsky found exhibited all vices practiced by the human animal, all sins generated by his half-bestial instincts. Here, as in

Gorky's *Lower Depths,* man, on the surface, at least, appears in a state of hopeless decomposition, with nothing left to either guide him or instill hope in him,—nothing to awake in his conscience feelings of devotion, faith and friendship. All that is humane and human is subtracted from this "anthropoid", leaving but a physical frame that drags out a desolate existence, devoid of every mark distinguishing the creature fashioned after the Image of God from the lowest zoölogical species.

Such, even today, is the traditional conception of beings who dwell behind prison walls built for the desperadoes of our modern Babylons. On the gates of these sad abodes we always seem to behold Dante's fatal warning: *"Lasciate ogni esperanza. . . ."* Dostoievsky himself entertained no illusions about these miserable pariahs:

> "All convicts",—says he—"with the exception of a few who enjoyed childish gaiety and who, for this reason alone, drew upon themselves general contempt,—all convicts were morose, envious, frightfully vain, presumptuous, susceptible and excessively ceremonious. To be astonished at nothing, in their view, was the foremost and indispensable quality. . . . They were . . . morbidly vain, and vanity was always their salient trait. The majority of the prisoners were depraved and perverted so that calumnies and scandal rained amongst them like hail."

Is not this a harsh indictment?—And yet, here is the reverse side of the medal:

> "I, for one,"—states Dostoievsky—"am ready to bear witness to the fact that amidst the most ignorant and oppressed strata, among those sufferers, I used to encounter most refined psychic traits. It would happen, in prison, that I would be knowing a man for years, and I would think about him, rather as of a beast, than of a human being, and would be despising him. But all of a sudden, a moment would come when, through some involuntary impulse, his soul revealed itself, and I would discover in it such wealth of feeling . . . , such a lucid understanding of his own and other people's sorrows, that I would open my eyes in bewilderment, and, at first, I would even hardly believe that I, myself, had heard and witnessed the thing."

In other words, Dostoievsky did not rest content with any commonplace verdict of parochial ethics on the nature of them whom Enrico Ferri has labeled "incorrigible delinquents", but in whose dark and lost souls the Russian novelist descried sparks of genuinely kind inclinations and strangely touching emotions.

Can one forget Ossip, that Hercules of the "dead house", who, in some most mysterious manner, managed, day after day, with almost religious zeal, to roast a piece of meat for Dostoievsky? Or Akim Akimitch, the "good conduct man" and our writer's silent tea partner? Or young and enigmatic Sirotkin, the cold-blooded murderer of a captain in his regiment, tenderly devoted to his mother?

> "Mild and tranquil, he spoke little and rarely laughed; his blue eyes, clear complexion and light hair gave him a soft expression which even his shaven crown did not destroy."

And above all, Souchíloff, whose admiration of Dostoievsky and disinterested affection for him were really pathetic?—The day when, at last, Dostoievsky was given back his freedom—that day was the saddest in Souchíloff's unhappy life:

> "Poor Souchíloff,"—exclaims the author—"how he cried when I gave him my clothes, my shirts, my trouser straps and some money. ' 'Taint that, 'taint that,' he said, as he bit his trembling lips, ' 'Tis that I am going to lose you . . . ! What *shall* I do without you?' "

Indeed, there was something incongruent and queer about these inhabitants of the "dead house": much as they were debased brutes, now and then, rather unexpectedly, they would evince signs of good will that placed them on a level common to all, or they would divulge carefully concealed compassion for others' sorrows, even if it was only for the aches of a wounded bird held by them in captivity. Why did they decide to set free the dying eagle?—One of them gave away the secret: "Let him die,"—he said—"but let him die in freedom".

> "One afternoon when the drum beat for beginning work, the convicts took the eagle, tied his

> beak (for he struck a desperate attitude), and took him out of the prison on to the ramparts. The twelve men of the gang were extremely anxious to know whither the bird would go. It was a strange thing; they all seemed to be as happy as though they themselves had got their freedom."

And by these traits—scattered though they may be—the men who forge their own chains are, perhaps, vindicated, even if not in the eyes of the stern laws devised by our wise legislators, yet certainly in the last judgment of Him Who, in Dostoievsky's words, "has had pity on all men", and Who "has understood all things."

VI

WHILE in prison, our writer had ample time and opportunity to dwell upon the vexing riddle of what, in scientific argot, is termed as "crime causation". He carefully catalogued his observations, and, later, these enabled him, in the character of Smerdiakov, for instance (*Brothers Karamazov*), or in Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*), to draw perfect diagnoses of murderers' psychology. And what a network of controversial impulses and hesitating moods, indeed, this is!—Here is the inception of the dreadful thought: for the first time, the mirage of the future crime, idly, as it were, flashes through, and then vanishes from, consciousness. Ostensibly it has left there no trace. But, after all, the contagious germ did produce a slight scratch, a scarcely noticeable furrow.

Again and again, the seductive vision will come back: now it is no longer an abstract dream; it has reached the proportions of a possible, though still vaguely contemplated, scheme. The casual suggestion of yesterday: *couldn't* the crime be committed?—today has turned into a piercing query: *shouldn't* it be committed? Now the struggle begins: the voice of conscience wisely cautions: "Thou shouldstn't be doing this", yet, the urge for morbid self-gratification treacherously counsels: "But why not?—Later your chance may be lost forever!"—And so the inner strife goes on unabated, until the tortured mind is absorbed by one burning set of problems: *"How* shall I go about it? When? Where? By what means? And above all: *How* shall I escape unnoticed and unsuspected?"—Finally, the burst of stored-up energy has got to come, and the horrible reality of a perpetrated crime is all that is left in the sad vacuum of the sinner's heart.

Now, all these psychological stages of the birth, growth, deepening and consummation of the criminal intent are admirably portrayed by Dostoievsky in a long gallery of his murderers, plotters and criminals in general.

But Dostoievsky did more than that: as if anticipating the historical tourney between Lombroso and the so-called environmentalists of our day on the question whether criminals are born or made, the Russian novelist has once and forever settled their dispute: *Criminals*—he told us—*are neither born nor made—they are born and made.*

In world literature, the crime topic occupies a prominent place and has found its artistic expression in the works of many a famous man of letters: Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Poushkin, Ibsen, Poe, Zola and Maupassant, have each, in turn, contributed their share of insight to the interpretation of delinquency. But none of these masters has succeeded in presenting a picture of the criminogenic process as clear and precise as that which Dostoievsky bequeathed to mankind in his undying novels.

Even before the latest findings of our present-day crime explorers, Dostoievsky justly declined to reduce antisocial behavior to any one cause or any one set of stimuli. To him, the actuality of crime is an infinitely complex resultant of widely contrastive factors in their ever-changing interplay and endless combinations.

Take the murder of Fëdor Karamazov by his butler and illegitimate son, Smerdiakov. Criminologists, say, of the Marxian school, would probably seek to explain this crime by one single motive of greed, which, to be sure, does hold its legitimate place among a large number of other equally important events, impulses and circumstances which predetermine the lackey's moral doom.

One has only to read the novel—there we find an all-embracing answer to the question: *Why* did Smerdiakov kill the old reprobate?—According to Dostoievsky, the murder is a compound function of physiological, psychological and environmental facts. The first group comprises Smerdiakov's tainted heredity, the illegitimacy of his birth and epilepsy. But physiology is only one side of the matter, and Dostoievsky brings into action a whole array of psychological data: here, covetousness secretly conspires with religious disbelief; here, the egocentric instinct fosters the sinister craving for a bourgeois paradise; here, a petty thief is driven to bloody murder, because how otherwise can he steal the banknotes which Karamazov-*père* is voluptuously hiding under his pillowcase for Grúshenka?

Then come the vicious contacts of a putrefied entourage: has not Smerdiakov's education been thoroughly neglected, and his brain depraved by his own father? Has not Dmitry, carried to frenzy by a rival passion for his father's potential sweetheart, instructed the butler to spy upon his master? And did not Smerdiakov's own brother, Ivan, amidst the general disintegration of the Karamazov family, teach him that there is neither morality nor virtue, cleverly inculcating into this half-idiot the so-called Napoleonic idea?

The third, and last, talk of Smerdiakov with Ivan after old Karamazov's tragic end, is a brilliant exposé of the psychic states which finally found their outward expression in the act of the murder. Smerdiakov hands over to Ivan the stolen money:

> "I don't need it at all. . . ."—he says—"Formerly I did have the idea that with this sum I might start living in Moscow, or still better, abroad; yes, I had this thought, more particularly as 'everything is permitted'. You taught me the truth; in those days you told me many things; for if there is no everlasting God, then also there is no such thing as virtue, nor is virtue needed at all. You told me the truth. Accordingly, I made up my mind."

Of course, the impulse of cupidity is conspicuous in Smerdiakov; but its significance is overshadowed by other motives which resolve themselves into an unwholesome philosophy of amorality.

Ivan's mind, deep and manifold as its manifestations are, is a product of those social strata which, in themselves, carry the germ of their own destruction. It is neither the lack of education, nor still less, the absence of mental ability, that dooms them: they must go because of the total dilapidation of all their ethical concepts. Egoism and egotism become the only two propelling factors in their conduct, and Ivan ultimately falls a prey to self-centered narcissism. But Smerdiakov is only Ivan's ape, his psychic shadow. In him, like in an inverted mirror, the abstract speculations of Ivan transform themselves into mental caricatures and vulgar misconceptions which he uses for the justification of his own despicable aims.

Here, the whole cluster of pathogenic influences, psycho-physical and social, suddenly convey to a moral weakling, like Smerdiakov, the courage to transgress that almost untraceable line that separates the two stages of a criminal act—the last momentary hesitation, and the last instantaneous resolve to precipitate a tragedy.

VII

WITH the publication of *The Dead House* (1861), Dostoievsky's interest in the delinquent world did not cease, and several years later, he wrote *Crime and Punishment,* which is among the greatest of his creations. Perhaps in no other work of imaginative literature has the theme of wrong been explored as deeply and with such penetrating vigor as in that famous novel.

Three independent, yet closely knit, problems are raised and brilliantly solved by Dostoievsky in this masterful and artistic treatise on morbid psychology. The first, and possibly the cardinal one, is that of the intrinsic meaning of crime—not as a formal, or abstract, violation of some static norm inscribed in the penal code, but from the standpoint of its silent growth into a fixed ideational content, which conveys to the guilty deed the character of living realness.

Next comes the question of the conflicting psychic states which precede and accompany the commission of any grave offense. To the jurist, these hidden workings of the mind are of immediate and practical import, since their correct diagnosis often furnishes the means for the determination of the delicate, and somewhat technical, proposition whether the offender's act was a premeditated or merely intentional, though not accidental, one: did he plan it, carefully weighing beforehand the facts and circumstances which had to be either overcome, or taken advantage of, in carrying out the evil intent; or was his crime brought about by a sudden fit of anger and passion, by some casual event which impelled him to wield his weapon against an unforeseen victim?

Finally, Dostoievsky goes into the nature of punishment—again, not in its legalistic sense, but as an oppressing moral aftermath disturbing the criminal conscience, that burdensome feeling, which may persist long after the term of the sentence has been served.

And then, where is the trustworthy criterion of right and wrong?—Does the verdict "yes, guilty" necessarily coincide with the subjective realization of guilt by the offender himself?—Dostoievsky maintains that there is no logical equation between the outward punishment and the inner suffering to which sometimes, though not always, the criminal is subjected as a direct consequence of the wrong committed by him.

Insulted by poverty, pathologically sensitive and over-susceptible by nature, Raskolnikov, a student in the St. Petersburg University, begins to dwell upon the grave injustice of a civilization which not only tolerates, but tacitly sanctions, misery, nourishing humiliation and shame. With stubborn persistence he is contrasting the elaborate artifice of the social order, forcibly wrought upon man, with the pathetically real existence of the individual endeavoring, in vain, to uphold his right to self-assertion, his undeniable, but frequently denied, claim to happiness.

Like Herman in Poushkin's *Queen of Spades,* Raskolnikov is perplexed by the idea that a creature, old and useless, yet safely protected by a whole battery of drastic conventions, should be enjoying a life full of comfort and ease, whereas the young and ambitious, capable of great achievements, but handicapped by destitution, should be doomed to drag out their lives in the clutch of physical privation aggravated by mental agony.

Raskolnikov reasons that he, the *homo sapiens,* is vested by destiny with the *right* to remedy, by his own volition, the wrong which underlies the structure of our hypocritical society. His is a proud belief in the superman who has the *power* to dare, to challenge, to transgress, whether he actually resorts to it or not. In this the hero of *Crime and Punishment* presents a striking parallelism with the Miser Knight who knows the unlimited potency of gold—that master of all masters.

> "I'm calm"—in a state of self-intoxication utters the Knight—"I know my might. . . ."

To Raskolnikov, reason—rebellious and haughty reason—assumes the place of the Miser's gold. He knows that nothing can withstand the dynamo of a defying intellect. The "solitary and calm realization" of this "truth", according to Merejkovsky, is the essence of Raskolnikov's spiritual aristocratism. An extreme individualist, he professes boundless faith in the self-contained value of man's unrepeatable "I". He divides mankind into two classes: on the one hand—the grey mass, the rabble, the "louses", the spineless creatures devoid of will and daring; on the other—the heroes, the movers, the shakers, the destructors,—they who are capable of smashing every dogma of religion, every law of ethics. They are necessarily lone—these fallen angels, these mighty insurgents against the dominion of God—and in their very retirement they find the source of their inner freedom.

To which of the two categories of men does Raskolnikov belong?—The thought that he actually is only a "louse"—to him is mortifying. He is going to *prove* that he has the nerve to *dare*. He will sin. He will *"transgress"*.

All these speculations finally culminate in a theoretical maxim which Raskolnikov himself expresses in words which have become classical:

> "In my judgment",—says he—"if Keppler's and Newton's discoveries, owing to any reason whatsoever, could not have become known to the world otherwise than by means of a sacrifice of, say, one, ten, one hundred, etc., persons hindering these . . . , Newton would have had the right, or even would have been in duty bound, to . . . eliminate these ten, or one hundred, men so as to throw his discoveries open to mankind."

Without being aware of it, Raskolnikov is skating on thin ice: Newton's "right" to eliminate all obstacles, in our hero's view, is based upon the principle of justice to mankind—that very herd of human beings which he ostensibly despises. Men should not be deprived of the benefits of Newton's genius; they all should be getting their little share in it. And he draws this conclusion:

> "Everybody, not merely the great men, even those who only slightly can get out of the rut, that is, only a wee bit capable of uttering some petty new thing,—they too, by their very nature, must of necessity be criminals—more or less, of course."

Distinctly, this is no longer Nietzschean philosophy, but that of the M. P. Laborite, or of a Salieri, if you please: he, too, has "gotten out of the rut" by developing a "musical ear" and achieving "obedient, but dry, agility" in his fingers.

According to Raskolnikov, then, Salieri's revolt against Mozart is vindicated by some principle of equity, by the fact itself that injustice has been done somewhere, by some one, maybe in Heaven, from whence the divine law of inequality has been handed down unto the "poor sons of dust" crawling on this earth.

Of course, no one wishes to live in a wheel track, and, therefore, *everybody,* including the invertebrates, just as much as the heroes themselves, *has the right* to exceed all barriers and join the glorious company of "conscientious objectors". Thus, the demarcation line between the Napoleons and the mob is altogether effaced: the steel of the hero suddenly becomes dissolved in the slime of the "louse".

Raskolnikov is firmly convinced that his are bold ideas of a Babeuf—but, essentially, his world outlook is that of a gregarious petit bourgeois, or an envious socialist, secretly cherishing the hope of becoming rich some day, and curing all earthly ills by the panacea of an "even" redistribution of material wealth. The moral principle is simply excluded from the sociological theorem, and, again, the trivial music box tune of the '89 Declaration, with its empty phrase *"L'oubli ou le mépris des droits de l'homme sont l'unique cause des malheurs publics,"* * is sought to be converted into a thundering hymn of a wrathful social Nemesis.

---

* "The neglect or defiance of man's rights are the sole cause of public misfortunes."

Salieri's indignation against Mozart, like Raskolnikov's—against Alyona Ivanovna, the miserly old hag, are outbursts of one and the same psychological—rather logical—order: in both cases, an attempt is made to cure evil by crime, and to have our terrestrial sojourn arranged without the guiding intervention of the Almighty.

VIII

IT TOOK a long time and entailed much inner struggle before Raskolnikov had reached the stage where he began to feel sufficiently strong to put theory into practice.

With classical realism, Dostoievsky shows us how the seed of a psychotic idea slowly germinates in his hero, taking, step by step, an ever stronger hold over him, until, finally, it grows into an obsession which no longer can be resisted.

When, for the first time, he pays a "reconnoitering" visit to Alyona Ivanovna, the greedy pawnbroker, mercilessly exploiting her poverty stricken clients and abusing her younger sister, Lizaveta, a remarkably meek and timid creature,—he leaves the "awful old harpy" fully satisfied that the idea of the murder is a purely chimerical project:

> "All that's nonsense,"—he said hopefully to himself—"and there is nothing in it at all to worry

> about. It's simply physical derangement: Just a glass of beer, a piece of dry bread—and in one moment, the brain will be stronger, the mind—clearer, and the will—firm! Phew, how utterly petty it all is!"

But only a day or two later, by accident, Raskolnikov overhears in the billiard room a conversation between a young college boy and an army officer, which makes him shudder. They chat about Alyona Ivanovna:

> ". . . 'I'll tell you what,' exclaimed the freshman, 'I could kill that damned old woman and make off with her money . . . without the faintest conscience prick. . . . I am joking, of course, but look here: On one side we have a stupid, senseless, worthless, spiteful, ailing, horrid old woman, not simply useless, but doing actual mischief, who has no idea what she is living for . . . you understand? . . . On the other side, fresh young lives thrown away for want of help, and by thousands, on every side! A hundred thousand good deeds could be done and helped on that old woman's money . . . hundreds, thousands, perhaps, might be set on the right path. . . . Kill her, take her money, and with the help of it, devote yourself to the service of humanity and the good of all. What do you think, *would not one tiny crime be wiped out by thousands of good deeds? . . . One death—and a hundred lives in exchange.—It's simple arithmetic!*' "

Here ethics are dissolved in arithmetic, and this is precisely Raskolnikov's own credo: the immensely complex social problem is artificially reduced to the two by two rule, moral ideas being converted into integers, and psychological postulates—into mere mechanics.

Still, even at this stage, it might not have been impossible for Raskolnikov to abandon his criminal scheme. From a practical point of view, as yet, nothing has been settled. Perhaps the most embarrassing was this question: *When* could he penetrate Alyona Ivanovna's apartment so as to find her alone, without Lizaveta?—When?—This difficulty alone, in all probability, would have acted as a powerful deterrent. Ah, but life is a long chain of unexpected coincidences: Shortly after the thrilling discussion over the billiard table, the poor student happened to be crossing the Hay Market Square, and there stood Lizaveta talking to her friends, a huckster and his wife. Unnoticed, Raskolnikov started listening to their conversation, and a minute later, to his amazement, he learned that next day, at seven o'clock in the evening, Lizaveta was to meet someone far away from her home.

Now the torturous doubt "When?" suddenly was answered definitely and with tragic accuracy. The Hay Market incident shook Raskolnikov's brain to its very foundation; in a state of delirium he returned to his miserable attic, and just fell on his couch. He knew not how long he lay there, but when he awoke, someone in the courtyard below, answering a fellow's question, shouted:

" 'It struck six long ago'.
Long ago?—My God!"

And then this happened:

"He rushed to the door, listened, caught up his hat and began to descend his thirteen steps cautiously, noiselessly, like a cat. He had still the most important thing to do—to steal the axe from the kitchen. . . . One trifling circumstance upset his calculations, before he had even left the staircase. When he reached the landlady's kitchen, the door of which was open as usual, he glanced cautiously in to see whether, in Nastasya's absence, the landlady herself was there, or if not, whether the door to her own room was closed, so that she might not peep out when he went in for the axe. But what was his amazement when he suddenly saw that Nastasya was not only at home in the kitchen, but was occupied there, taking linen out of a basket and hanging it on a line. Seeing him, she left off hanging the clothes, turned to him and stared at him all the time he was passing. He turned away his eyes, and walked past as though he noticed nothing. But it was the end of everything: He had not the axe! He was overwhelmed. 'What made me think,' he reflected, as he went under the gateway, 'What made me think that she would be sure not to be home at that moment! Why, why, why did I assume this so certainly?'—He was crushed and even humiliated. . . . A dull animal rage boiled within him. He stood hesitating in the gateway. . . . 'And what a chance I have lost forever!' he muttered, standing aimlessly in the gateway, just opposite the porter's little dark room, which was also open.

> Suddenly, he started. From the porter's room, two paces away from him, something shining under the bench . . . caught his eye. . . . He looked about him—nobody. He approached the room on tiptoe, went down two steps, and in a faint voice called the porter. 'Yes!—Not at home!' . . . He dashed to the axe (it was an axe) and pulled it out from under the bench. . . . At once, before going out, he made it fast in the noose; he thrust both hands into his pockets, and slipped out of the room. No one had noticed him!—'When reason fails, the devil helps!'—he thought, with a strange grin. This chance raised his spirits extraordinarily."

And, assuming an unconcerned air, he walked along quietly, without hurry. An hour later, the double murder (Lizaveta, after all, did not go to see her friend) was an accomplished fact.

IX

RASKOLNIKOV'S is a typically "theoretical crime", born in the convulsions of shattered hopes and raging protests. For the superman, our three dimensional world is too narrow, its Euclidean laws are too ossified. Down with stability! Long live the fourth dimension! *Vive Napoléon!*

> "What difference does it make,"—exclaimed Bonaparte once while conversing with Talleyrand—"you should know that I wouldn't be scared by

> vileness, provided I found it useful for my purposes. As a matter of fact, there is in this world nothing either noble or mean. . . . Speaking frankly, I am vile, essentially vile. I give you my word of honor that I would experience no revulsion for that which in their language is called 'a dishonest act'."

On another occasion, Napoleon made this blunt remark:

> "A man like myself spits on the lives of a million men."

Like in Machiavelli's *Il Principe,* the end justifies the means: no method is wrong and no device sinful so long as they serve a useful purpose. And on St. Helena the deposed ruler meditates:

> "One of my greatest thoughts was the gathering of peoples, though geographically united, but . . . dismembered by revolutions and politics."

He was dreaming of something in the order of the Wilsonian "League of Nations"—*"association Européenne"* as he used to call it:

> "How beautiful it would have been, amidst this march of nations, to be transmitted to posterity, blessed by the benedictions of centuries!"

What a kingly dream! . . . And he went on pondering over other things which could have materialized were his magnificent career not interrupted by the cruel gods: He would have introduced "a system of universal equality" and put an end to all wars; he would have insured perpetual peace; he would have founded "the Kingdom of Reason" in which all human faculties would have attained their complete expression and final triumph.

Such was Napoleon's dream, which cost mankind . . . two million lives.

In Napoleon's historical and Raskolnikov's fictitious cases, bloodshed and violence are not crimes at all, as there is neither right nor wrong, "neither nobleness nor vileness". Everything comes down to rational formulae, whether in the garb of international peace, or in the guise of Newton's law of universal gravitation.

To Raskolnikov the elimination of the covetous hag, far from being a crime, is a laudable act, so that her blood should not be weighing on his conscience. Such is the Russian rebel's theory; it coincides to the dot with that of Bonaparte's. But here, the identity of the two credos ends. At this point, the hero bids adieu to the criminal.

Napoleon sheds human blood without the slightest remorse or hesitation; he is sure that his mission can be achieved only by "fire and sword"; his *amor fati* drives him from one adventure to another, and even Waterloo fails to awake him to the horror of his earthly accomplishments.

Not so with Raskolnikov, whose heart is in hopeless discord with his mind: arithmetically, the theory which he has evolved is correct, at least, he thinks it is; but, intuitively, he feels that it is nothing but flimsy sophistry. Even before he commits his butchery, he sees a fearful dream about the pitiful mare beaten to death by a score of drunken peasants.

Indeed, this pathological vision is a masterstroke of Dostoievsky's ingenious psychiatric discernment. Essentially, deep within him, Raskolnikov is honest, kind and even tenderhearted. But all these sentiments have to be banished from a mind keyed up by the obsessional task of devising a Napoleonic symbol of faith, and in order not to spoil its logical effect, the sum total of all moral principles on which he had been brought up must be subdued, compressed into a complex and drowned in the dark gulf of the unconscious. This he struggles to accomplish: in his waking hours he seems to believe in the reality of the phantasms created by that ill and fatigued brain of his; he forgets the simple and noble truths which he had learned in childhood. But here, in his frenzied rovings, the repressed ideas, by some devious route, lurk back into the trains of his conscious ego, warning him—now for the last time—of the vicious sinfulness of the act which he is about to undertake.

The French demigod was never known to have had qualms of this kind. To him, the sound of barking cannons was the loveliest music, and the bloody picture of a battle field—the most enchanting sight. He was different from the rest. Proudly, but with utmost sincerity, he said about himself:

> "I am not like the others, and the laws of morality . . . could not have been created for me."

Impregnable like a granite rock, he stands motionless in the face of eternity: "My soul is carved out of marble and my heart is immune to common weaknesses."—And to common virtues, too.—Such, indeed, are the great criminal heroes in world history.

But Raskolnikov! . . . Though dreaming of becoming a Prometheus, proudly challenging the gods of the Olympus, he impotently shrinks from his own deed, just as Poushkin's pigmy after his insane threat against the Bronze Giant. At the scene of the crime, faced with the corpses of his two victims, Raskolnikov is struck by frantic horror; he almost forgets the purpose of the murder, and he is ready to flee from the shameful battle field without seizing any of the woman's hoardings. And later, in a purely Smerdiakov fashion, he anxiously gets rid of the trophies of his "victorious" venture.

X

SOME years ago, there lived in Russia a well known novelist by the name of *Gleb Ivánovich* Ouspensky: Like Gogol, he was endowed by nature with a sense of incomparable humor, and strangely, also like Gogol, he became mentally deranged: during his delirious paroxysms, it seemed to him that *"Gleb",* who symbolized the idea of righteousness and justice, was desperately struggling with his demon *"Ivánovich",* the incarnation of bestiality —that "swine element", which drove poor Ouspensky to vicious intemperance of the queerest kind.

A victim of modern skepsis, Raskolnikov, too, possesses a double personality, exhibiting the deep rift of a hopelessly dissociated consciousness: his reasoning is reflexive, continuously torn between *"Ivánovich",* the studiously elaborated criminal philosophy, and *"Gleb",* the emotional system revolting against it. And there is no collusion between *"Gleb"* and *"Ivánovich"* because, down below, in the submerged realms of his psyche, the stern dicta of the Ten Commandments still prevail over the egocentric Nietzschean battle cry: *"Alles ist erlaubt",* boldly professed by his sick intellect.

In the last analysis, then, the shedding of human blood, to Raskolnikov, *is* a crime for which he will suffer punishment. With merciless candor, he tears off the deceiving mask from his authentic face:

> "I went into it like a wise man"—he says to Sonia—"and that was just my destruction. . . . You mustn't suppose I didn't know . . . when I worried myself all those days whether Napoleon

> would have done it or not . . . that, of course, I wasn't a Napoleon. . . . I didn't do the murder to gain wealth or power, or to become a benefactor to mankind. Nonsense! I simply did it; I committed the murder for myself, for myself alone, and whether I became a benefactor to others, or spent my life like a spider catching men in my web, and sucking the life out of them, I couldn't have cared at that moment. . . . It was not so much the money I wanted, but something else. . . . I wanted to find out then, and quickly, whether I was a louse, like everybody else, or a man; whether I can step over barriers or not . . . ; whether I am a trembling creature, or whether I have the *right. . . ."*

Indeed, there is one step only from the sublime to the ridiculous, but an infinite distance—from the ridiculous to the sublime. A criminal of Raskolnikov's make is not likely to inspire others with an urge to follow his example. Precisely here lies the difference between Napoleon, the hero, and Raskolnikov, the felon. It does require a Napoleon to cease to be a Robespierre, and one has to have something more in him than a mere "anti-social propensity" to command the admiration of the masses, to inspire wild enthusiasm in the soldiers, in those men who, as Hugo said:

"Comprenant qu'ils allaient mourir dans cette fête,
Saluerènt leur dieu debout dans la tempête." *

---

* "Aware that, in this feast, they all marched to their death,
They hailed their god, amid the tempest's breath."

Nor was this reverence for "the little Corporal" confined to the plain people. Did not Goethe, the wisest among the wise, compare Napoleon with the greatest among the great, with Humboldt and Peter?—

And Poushkin: Did not the noblest poet of Russia exonerate her mightiest enemy when he said:

"But shame and curses without number
Upon that reptile head be laid,
Whose senseless blame shall vex the slumber
Of him—that sad discrownèd shade!
Praised be!—He showed the Russian nation
Their lofty fate, and even stilled,
From exile's gloom, for man's elation,
Eternal liberty he willed."

What did Poushkin imply in the significant words: "Eternal liberty"? What did the captive Cæsar will to mankind?—Was it merely the *Code Napoléon,* lasting though it may have proved?—Or the Concordat which restored the union between the heart of France and the soul of Italy, those secular ties between Paris and Rome which were smashed by the hurricane of 1793?—Nay, these things, much as they were impressive, would have not led Poushkin to connote the Napoleonic idea with that of "eternal liberty". With the intuition of a genius, he surmised the primary truth of Napoleon's historical significance: he perceived in him not merely the shine and luster of "the sun of Austerlitz", but the last vindication of man's inner free resolve to choose his own road toward the realization of the mysterious goals which dawn in the misty distances of centuries to come.

XI

TORMENTED by pangs of conscience, outwitted by the sharp dialectics of Porfíry Petróvich, the prosecutor in charge of the investigation of the "pawnbroker murder"; swayed by the tender compassion of Sonia,—one morning Raskolnikov decided to confess his crime. He walked into the police station ready to tell his story, but a minute later, he suddenly changed his mind: Why should any outsider learn his secret?—Reeling, overtaken with giddiness, unaware of what he was doing, he started down the stairs, leaning against the wall.

> "He went down and out into the yard. There, not far from the entrance, stood Sonia, pale and horror-stricken. She looked wildly at him. He stood still before her. There was a look of poignant agony, of despair, in her face. She clasped her hands. His lips worked in an ugly, meaningless smile. He stood still a minute, grinned and went back to the police office."

There, he dropped helplessly onto a chair in front of the officer on duty, and softly, in a broken voice, but distinctly said:

> "It was I who killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them."

This was the beginning of Raskolnikov's punishment. In his case the expiation process proved painfully slow and oppressive. Caught in the vicious circle of frigid ratiocinations, he lost all moral perspective, all criteria of right and wrong, every grain of self-reliance, every atom of self-respect. With faith long dimmed in his haughty mind, he scoffed at religion, and to him, the Church was an emblem of backwardness and reaction.

All these utilitarian and materialistic doctrines which were so eagerly consumed by the Russian heralds of radicalism and pioneers of revolution, artificially kept the minds of the younger generation in a state of incoherent unrest, spreading an epidemic of discontent, and creating that empty "from nothing, through nothing, to nothing" atmosphere, which was the emotional background of nihilism, which Dostoievsky's Raskolnikov and Turgenev's Bazárov (*Fathers and Sons*) so vividly typify.

Critics of those days peevishly attacked Dostoievsky for having calumniated, in the character of Raskolnikov, Russian youth, with its daring leanings and stubborn opposition to conventions of every kind. It will be recalled that up to the time of the publication of *Crime and Punishment,* our novelist, owing to his Siberian record, had been enjoying the reputation of a convinced Westerner and a *libre penseur*. But, in this novel, the author's approach to the social problem; his views on religion and education; his fervent protest against the rationalistic dogma,—all this stood in obvious contradiction with extremist ideology whether of the Oriental or Occidental impress.

Again, as in the case of Gogol's *Selected Portions,* Dostoievsky was promptly rebuked for having betrayed his own political credo and joined the conservative camp. Raskolnikov—it was claimed—was scarcely more than a bastard and utterly unreal fabrication in whom Dostoievsky deliberately concocted every possible trait of wickedness, every attribute of psychic degeneracy.

The truth is that Dostoievsky discerned in the conduct and aspirations of the younger sets a total loss of the religious ideal which, to him, was an unmistakable symptom of their moral tottering and mental disintegration.

The prophetic genius of Dostoievsky clearly portended the sad events which, only a few years later, in the Seventies', marred the liberal reign of Alexander II by a series of political murders, which culminated in the base crime of March 1, 1881, when Russia's most benevolent Monarch was assassinated by a bomb hurled at his carriage by two young Russian desperadoes of the bushy-haired mould.

Of course, Dostoievsky was in no sympathy with political fanaticism of this kind, and only five years later, in *The Possessed,* he framed a lasting indictment of those godless adventurers who dreamed of nothing but destruction and for whom the idea of a social bedlam was the most cherished goal and the *ultima ratio* of political wisdom.

With all this, artistic tact guarded Dostoievsky against any hyperbolic tendencies in the interpretation of Raskolnikov's character. Today, in the light of historical perspective, the hero of *Crime and Punishment* no longer appears to us as an accomplished and calm thinking villain, like Robert the Devil, for instance, or Schiller's Gessler. The drama of Raskolnikov is rather that of a Hamlet torn asunder by the maniacal dilemma: "To be, or not to be", while theirs is not only egoistic sufferance, but likewise altruistic compassion. As Dostoievsky's hero in the *Underworld,* Raskolnikov is living through a constant "fever of fluctuations", through the agony of "forever adopted decisions" and "their immediate repudiations."

All these ambivalential symptoms, far from being grotesque or invented, are preëminently human, and in some measure, common to all men.

But Raskolnikov is not merely a psychologically true character—historically he is real, too: his ancestry goes back to the Onegins and Pechórins, with their queer ideational vanity, their chilly indifference "to the bad things as well as the good"

—an attitude which Poushkin ascribed to a "feeling of superiority, imaginary perhaps." Raskolnikov is also a by-product of that "superiority complex" which, in him, assumes the form of a Napoleonic vision of the superman and the Nietzschean egocentric "love for the distant" as opposed to the Christian or altruistic love for one's neighbor.

For the first time, in Russian literature, the phenomenon of nihilism was attacked in all its psycho-social complexity. With good reason, N. N. Strakhov, a contemporary of Dostoievsky's, expressed this view:

> ". . . Even though Raskolnikov does suffer from youthful faint-heartedness and egoism, yet he possesses vestiges of a firm mind and a warm heart. He is not a *causeur,* devoid of either blood or nerves. He is a real man . . . , he breaks his life, sacrificing it for a theory, but he does not sink into ludicrous ugliness and foolishness. The rupture with life, precisely because of its depth, brings about a fearful reaction in the soul of this young man. . . . He is unable to bear the burden of that negation of human instincts, which leads him to commit his crime."

To Dostoievsky, the problem of Raskolnikov was essentially an ethical one, for he never acquiesced in the hope that a moral philosophy can be successfully built without the Divine principle as its underlying foundation and "categorical imperative". This is why the punishment of Raskolnikov, the tedious and irksome process of his inner betterment, could not have begun before religion, in some form or other, had blessed his bewildered heart. Sonia, the downtrodden prostitute, who heroically decides to share Raskolnikov's fate by following him into exile; Sonia, by her touching love for the unhappy dreamer,—accomplishes a miracle which no pseudo-learned theories and deceitful plots of reason could have ever produced.

In the Epilogue, Raskolnikov is pictured in Siberia. We find him, perhaps for the first time, meditating over the New Testament:

> "The book belonged to Sonia. . . . He had asked her for it himself not long before his illness, and she brought it without a word. Till now, he had not opened it. He did not open it now, but one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now?' . . . At the beginning of their happiness . . . he did not know that the new life would not be given him for nothing; that he would have to pay dearly for it; that it would cost him great striving, great suffering. But this is the beginning of a new story—the story of the slow recovery of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new, unknown life."

Now, all these doubts and perplexing controversies of a confused mind, with its oscillations between dark despair and lucid hope; all the uncertainties and tortures gnawing a guilty soul,—all this, to Dostoievsky, signified the purifying process of expiation or punishment. Eventually—it may be surmised—Raskolnikov will emerge from this Purgatory cured and forgiven, again, as in early childhood, ready to embrace all things which, in man, are genuinely lovable, noble and good. And when this time comes, his faith will have been restored in Him Who at the raising of Lazarus has said:

> "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

XII

EVER since the Reformation, philosophy, in Western Europe, has assumed an existence almost independent from either religion or aesthetics. Accordingly, there, matters relating to the theory of knowledge, to the scope and limits of cognition, essentially exhausted the contents of gnosiological speculation. And even where, as in the case of Spinoza, Western thinkers have attempted to raise the proposition of the Absolute, their discussions have been largely confined to dispassionate analysis, based upon the formal laws of logic and cold empiricism. Religion itself, in Kant's formulation, appeared to them as "a *rational* necessity of man's *intelligent* nature." Theirs, then, was a slow, though sure, march of and toward science with its geometrical method, its microscopes and telescopes, its gravimeters and retorts; theirs was a heroic, yet unimaginative, struggle for the conquest of the knowable but still unknown,—a process of uninterrupted ratiocination, which, as Hobbes put it, is nothing but "addition and subtraction", with that concession only that it might also be "multiplication and division."

Not so in Russia: With strange persistence, the creative meditations of her artists would invade the realms of ontology, encouraging and urging the professional philosopher to dwell upon things not only unknown, but also unknowable, at least, in the sense that their truth cannot be demonstrated, whether by practical or pure reason. Here, the rational becomes supplanted by the super-rational, physics—by metaphysics, geometry—by metageometry, and the mere study of what Claude Bernard called *conditions* of phenomena, is superseded by an attempt to determine their ultimate *Cause.*

On this ground, Russian dialectics, in their historical aspect, not only can, but should, be examined in the light of the general growth of Russia's cultural self-consciousness. On her soil, ethics and aesthetics, these two branches of the philosophical tree, though spreading out in different directions, do have some roots in common which grow, develop, and finally become merged into substantially one and the same discipline.

Philosophy, and critical thought, and imaginative literature in the strict sense, in an equal measure, have all participated in the crystallization of Russian moral concepts. Gogol's, Tolstoy's, and particularly, Dostoievsky's contributions to the religious genius of Russia, indeed, are immense.

It is difficult to point out to any one of Dostoievsky's creations in which the problem of religion has not been dealt with in one form or another: throughout all his writings are scattered without number original and profound ideas on man's relation to the Supreme Being; the place occupied by the Church in the mass of other spiritual endeavors; the intrinsic nature of ethical, as distinguished from juridical, norms; the primordial antinomy encompassing the incomprehensible coexistence of God and Devil; the correlation between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy,—in brief, on every conceivable phase of theology, theodicy and religious philosophy in general.

But in no book, not even in *The Idiot* and *The Possessed,* have morality and religion been discussed with such an astounding depth as in *Brothers Karamazov,* that immortal poem of human suffering which Dostoievsky wrote with the blood of his heart. Of course, this work should not be conceived as a learned treatise on ecclesiastics: the novel is a priceless pearl of a great master's creative thought, just as much as *Crime and Punishment* and his other *opera magna.*

This last *chef d'œuvre* of Dostoievsky contains pictures of superb craftsmanship, dramatic situations of almost unbearable poignancy, images that will never be effaced from the memory of mankind,—and all characters are pathetically real.

Here, Dostoievsky's faculties of a peerless artist have reached their full expression, while the peculiarities of his potent talent have revealed themselves in devious and strangely intriguing forms.

The story of the murder of Fëdor Pavlovich Karamazov, brilliantly though it has been conceived, is only a frame, or setting, for an infinitely complex world of effervescent psychic states, inner conflicts, ideological controversies invading the doubting minds, afflicted hearts and distressed souls of all the actors in that turbulent drama *apassionata.* The atmosphere is pervaded with nervous tension. Like Ribera's tragic canvases, Dostoievsky's world is all glaring contrast: rebellious negation and fervent faith; filthy depravity and angelic chastity; satanic haughtiness and pious humility; bestial cruelty and all-forgiving kindness,—all this unfolds itself, appears and reappears in endless, and, at times, monstrous combinations. But throughout the novel there looms one outstanding, burning question: *Does God exist?*—And if His existence be undeniable, why, as a matter of fact, does evil not only persist, but score lasting triumphs in our troubled lives?—This is the old Gogol theme—God-Good vs. Devil-Evil. But how immeasurably deeper, with how many novel variations, has it been explored, developed, dissected, decomposed, analyzed and synthesized by Dostoievsky!

XIII

THE traditional view of Dostoievsky is that he was merely a devout son of the Russian Orthodox Church. This he surely was. But what a mistake to conceive in his mystical ideals mere loyalty to this or that denomination!—Besides, if Dostoievsky's faith was as solid and unshaken, as it may appear to the casual reader, what was the esoteric source of his continuous religious doubts?

With good reason, then, Merejkovsky observed once:

> "At times, Dostoievsky seems to have been afraid of his own face, which looked to him too novel and rebellious, indeed, even dæmonic, and, at any rate, not sufficiently 'popular', plain, Byzantic and Orthodox. And this true face of his he would conceal behind the mask of all his dissociated heroes —for the last time—in his 'Great Inquisitor'—behind the most transparent, and yet the most impervious of all masks; and he would so successfully hide it that, occasionally, he himself would be at a loss to find his features behind the mask,—the face and the mask merging in one. . . . At this point, the dreadful question suddenly is ready to arise in our minds: . . . What if the whole secret

> of Dostoievsky consisted in that very thing which exhausts the secret of his Great Inquisitor? What if Dostoievsky, too, simply 'did not believe in God', or believed in two Gods—in God and the Devil—who struggle in the hearts of men, but it is yet unknown which one of them will triumph? . . ."

However, the inference should not be drawn that there dwelled in Dostoievsky a microbe of agnosticism. The frigidly incredulous speculations of a Hume or a Locke had no appeal to a fervently searching mind like Dostoievsky's. With all his vexatious doubts he could have never composed a prayer such as was conceived by Renan—that great skeptic of the West—when, on the Acropolis, he kneeled down before the marble Goddess of Beauty, and worshippingly murmured:

> "Thou art true, pure and perfect! Thine is a flawless marble; but the Temple of Sophia, over there in Byzantine, by its bricks and plaster, also creates a divine impression. That Temple is the image of Heaven's vault.—It will crumble. And yet, if thy niche were to be large enough to shelter human crowds, it would crumble, too. An immense stream of oblivion sweeps us into a nameless gulf. Oh, unfathomable abyss! Thou art the *only* God: The tears of all people are real tears; the dreams of all sages contain a particle of Truth. Everything down here is but a symbol and a dream. The gods pass, just as men do, and it would not be good if they were eternal. The faith in them, which one had, should never be a chain. One is freed from it

when it has been cautiously rolled into the purple shroud in which the *dead* gods sleep."

No such thoughts would have been expressed by Dostoievsky. And yet, it is true that he did uncover the two abysses, both equally obscure—the bottomless gulf of faith in God and the dark precipice of godless incredulity. Strangely, there are moments when the two extremes, the two polar streams of man's consciousness, are drawn to one another, almost—though not quite—converging on one and the same idea symbolizing the Ultimate and Primal, the very last, or everlasting, Truth:

"The ends will touch each other,
And 'yes' and 'no' unite,
And merge in one another—
Their death will kindle Light."

Contrasts in analogies, analogies in contrasts—such is Dostoievsky's method. Rarely does he abide by Hegel's harmonic triad: in the Thesis-Antithesis-Supreme Synthesis cycle, he prefers to show us only its first two links, and the sharp contradiction between two incompatible propositions leaves us in a state of utter maze. Such, for instance, is the conflict between Father Zosima, on the one hand, and the Great Inquisitor—on the other.

In the character of the Russian monk, Dostoievsky sought to create a symbol of Christianity translated into people's every-day life. The achievement of such a living religion has always been his most cherished dream. Nor is there anything particularly dogmatic or denominationally orthodox in his ideal: Dostoievsky himself strongly stresses its universality, its adogmatic character. In his Poushkin speech, he said:

> "Indeed, the peoples of Europe even do not suspect how dear they are to us! . . . In the future . . . the Russians, each one of them, will comprehend that, in order that one be a real Russian he should try to bring about a final reconciliation of the European contradictions, showing the way out to Europe's anguish in his Russian, universal and all-uniting soul, with fraternal love absorbing in it all our brethren, and lastly, perhaps, to sound the decisive Word of great and complete harmony,—the ultimate brotherly concord of all nations abiding by the law of Christ and the Gospels."

Such is Dostoievsky's ideal: it is predicated on the principle of moral betterment which eventually will not only result in the regeneration of Russia, but must likewise lead to an *entente* of all peoples linked together by the durable ties of spiritual communion.

Of this universal brotherhood in Christ, Zosima is a vivid emblem. Though an Orthodox monk, and spending his life in monastic seclusion, he stands somehow outside Church hierarchy, while his catechism is free from any theological sectarianism. Essentially, his is a religion of Love:

> "At some thoughts"—he says—"one stands perplexed, especially at the sight of man's sin, wondering whether one should use force or humble love.—Always decide to use humble love. . . . Love is a teacher; but one must know how to acquire it. . . . It is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labor. . . . My brother used to ask forgiveness from the birds. This sounds senseless, but it is right; for all is like an ocean,—all is flowing and blending; a touch in one place sets up motion at the other end of the earth. . . . Birds would be happier at your side, . . . and children, and all animals, if you were nobler than you are now. Then you would be praying to the birds, too, consumed by all-absorbing love, in a sort of transport, and pray that they, too, should forgive you your sins. *Treasure this ecstasy*. . . . Pray to God for gladness. *Be glad as children,* as the birds of Heaven! . . ."

This is a broad world outlook which, indeed, is universal: potentially, all men can be united on this grand platform of love and gladness and humility and mercy.

Zosima stands in direct opposition to Father Mathew—the official exponent of arid, ascetic, conventional, puritanic and standardized Christianity. Father Mathew is all for sullen fasting, for the suppression in man of everything human. To this Savonarola of Orthodoxy, Poushkin's serene bequest,

"Let Sun live forever,
Let gloom disappear"

is taboo. His is a revolt of a dead spirit against the living flesh. If he had only had the power, he would have condemned and pronounced his wrathful anathema upon Zosima, because of his worship of *gladness,* his sympathetic understanding of one's joy of being young, one's love for the breath of Spring, for the happy hymns of the birds to the morning dew and the Golden Sun. For in Zosima's, like in Poushkin's, credo there prevails perfect equilibrium betwen body and soul—these two seemingly antagonistic, but, in truth, organically united, elements—of which Life is the everlasting synthesis.

XIV

IN THE character of Father Zosima, Dostoievsky sought to formulate his personal attitude toward Eastern Orthodoxy, not so much in its commonly recognized, or sectarian sense, but in the light of its intimate ideals, which, in some remote future, perhaps, may be attained by the Russian Church.

The old monk exercises an extraordinary influence over his many admirers and disciples who consider it a grievous sin to violate his orders and deviate from his benevolent advice. But their submission—or to use the ecclesiastical term, their "obedience"—to the saintly priest, is altogether voluntary: they follow him because they have boundless and mystical faith in him. He seeks no disciplinary power over his flock, for contrary to St. Augustine's teaching, Zosima's creed is one of complete spiritual freedom devoid of any outside coercion, and dependent on no reprisal other than that which the individual suffers through his natural sense of guilt.

On this salient theological point, Dostoievsky was in full accord with Khomiakóv, perhaps the deepest among the Russian moralists, who said:

> "On the hour designated by His wisdom, the Almighty revealed Himself in His beloved Son, in the Word of God, Who assumed the nature of Man; He manifested Himself in His infinite Love, *and freedom was then restored to man,* so that he be able to accept this revelation,"

of course, consciously and of his own unrestricted volition. But with freedom regained by us, simultaneously we became confronted with the vexing alternative between right and wrong, with the mortal danger of choice, though intuitively apprehended, but rationally not comprehended.

The fact itself that, in Western Europe, the legal, and not the ethical, principle is the underlying basis of her civilization, according to Dostoievsky, predetermined the general trend of the fallacies in the world outlook and religious tendencies developed by the Romanic and Germanic peoples.

The legalistic element which caught the West in its iron grip, instilled even in the pure realm of faith ferments of inevitable disintegration. Although Dostoievsky had never studied law, he ingeniously grasped the philosophical meaning of the juridical norm composed of three ingredients, ostensibly unlike, yet, in reality, soldered together—*right, obligation,* and *enforcement:* Right—on the one hand, corresponds to obligation—on the other, while right is protected, and obligation is enforced, by coercion.

The nature of a legal relationship, regardless of its intrinsic content, stands in direct contradiction with an ethical rule, where the sense of duty is a self-asserting and self-contained feeling, generating on the outside no right and tolerating not constraint of any kind. It follows, then, that if morality, and religion, as its highest manifestation, become subjected to compulsion—whether by the State or the Church—the necessity to abide by a religious commandment, created by such forcible intervention, loses its inner significance, ceases to be a *moral* obligation, being converted into a precept of either public or ecclesiastical *law.*

Dostoievsky maintained that the Roman Catholic Church slowly, but persistently, invaded the laic domain of the State. It was not a mere historical episode when the German Emperor Henry IV, in a beggar's attire, at the gates of Canossa, for three days in succession, has been imploring forgiveness from Pope Gregory VII; this event rather signified the triumph of the political power of the Church over the political power of the State, a signal victory of Vatican and Latin Christianity—*Tota Christianitas,* as it used to be called—over Rome as a civic body. The Popes, Dostoievsky bluntly claimed, consolidated their earthly power, not so much by the Cross and prayers as by sword and violence, seeking to open the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom, not with the keys of St. Peter, but by the battering ram of the Holy Inquisition.

XV

LAMARTINE was right when he stated in his *Graziella* that the Dome of St. Peter, that mighty symphony of bronze and marble carved by the genius of Michelangelo, stands out as an eternal reminder of the majestic grandeur of Latin Christianity, with its militant spirit, stern ritual and iron discipline.—But Dostoievsky conceived in Roman Catholicism itself the symbol and apotheosis of Western civilization, benumbed in the dead paleontological forms of unyielding rationalism. To this controversial and provocative idea, "The Legend of the Great Inquisitor", which Ivan tells to his brother Alyosha, is primarily dedicated.

The story takes place in Seville, Spain, during the darkest days of the Inquisition, when "splendid" *autos-da-fé* were lighted daily for the glory of our Lord and the Holy Church.

Swayed by incomprehensible mercy, Christ once more appears among His children.

> "He comes calmly, unobserved; but, strangely, every one recognizes Him. . . . The people are irresistibly drawn to Him, they surround Him, they flock about Him, follow Him. With a gentle smile of boundless compassion, He moves silently in their midst. The sun of love burns in His heart. Light and power shine from His eyes, and their radiance, shed on the people, stirs their hearts with responsive love. He holds out his hands to them, blesses them, and a healing virtue comes from contact with Him, even with His garments. . . . The crowd weeps, and kisses the earth under His feet. Children strew flowers before Him, sing, and cry hosannah. . . ."

Such is Christ's second apparition on earth. The people feel that His is a Kingdom of Love, an era of all-forgiveness, God's triumph here below. The whole city is swept by ardor, and the hearts of men are ready to accept the miracle. But at this very moment, the Cardinal, the Great Inquisitor himself, was passing by the Cathedral.

> "He was an old man, almost ninety, tall and erect, with a withered face and sunken eyes in which there was still a gleam of light. . . . At a distance behind him were following his gloomy assistants . . . and the holy guard. He stopped at the sight of the crowd and watched it . . . He saw every-

> thing . . . He knitted his thick grey brows and his eyes flamed with a sinister fire. Holding out his finger, he ordered the guards to take Him. And such was his power, so completely were the people cowed into submission . . . to him, that the crowd immediately made way for the guards, and amidst death-like silence, they lay hands on Him and led Him away."

This is the beginning of the conflict between Christ and the Great Inquisitor; between the King of the Heavenly Church and the Prince of its earthly hierarchy. Their tragic collision exhibits the full depth of the rupture between the teachings of Christ and their translation into our daily ecclesiastical practices.

By order of the Great Inquisitor, Christ is thrown into prison, and now, as fifteen centuries ago, He is again asked:

> "Is it Thou? Thou? . . . What canst Thou say to me?—I know too well what Thou wouldst say. And Thou hast no right to add anything to what Thou hast already said. Why, then, art Thou come to hinder us? . . . I know not who Thou art, and do not care to know, whether it is Thou or only a semblance of Him. But tomorrow I shall condemn Thee and burn Thee at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have today kissed Thy feet,—tomorrow, at the faintest sign from me, will rush to heap up the embers of Thy fires."

The Inquisitor gives his reasons why there is, and should be, no place for Christ on earth. The learned ascetic knows that Christ, in His message to mankind, bequeathed that freedom

> ". . . which men, in their simplicity and natural unruliness, cannot even comprehend, and which they fear and dread,—as nothing has ever been more insupportable to man than freedom."

The Church—says the Inquisitor—having relieved the people of the burden cast upon them by Christ, has "corrected" His work and restored *miracle, mystery* and *authority*—the only devices by which blind obedience can be maintained.

Like Le Bon, the Inquisitor is a profound student of mass psychology: he has scrutinized the popular mind, with its inherent craving for the *terre à terre* things. This sinister magician derives his view of religion from the strictly legalistic concept of ancient Roman law: *"Do ut des; facio ut facias"—"I give,—so that thou shouldst give; I do,—so that thou shouldst do,"*—a mere exchange of market values, a plain "tit-for-tat" proposition practiced over the counter of every shopkeeper in every land. This means that a moral command, in order that it be complied with by the mob, must be "sold" for some kind of equivalent, and the Cardinal says:

> "We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. . . . They will im-

> potently tremble before our wrath; their minds will grow fearful; like women and children, they will be quick to shed tears, but they will be just as ready, at a sign from us, to pass to laughter and joy, to happy mirth and childish song. . . . *Oh, we shall allow them even sin,* for they are feeble and helpless, and they will love us *like children* because we allow them to sin. We shall tell them that everything will be expiated, *if it is done with our permission;* that we allow them to sin because we love them, and that we take upon ourselves the punishment for these sins. . . ."

And he winds up his hideous discourse with this pathetic statement:

> "There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousand sufferers who assumed the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die; peacefully they will expire in Thy name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. . . . What I say to Thee will come to pass, and our dominion will be built. I repeat: Tomorrow Thou shalt see the obedient flock who, at a sign from me, will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn Thee for coming to hinder us. . . . If anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou. Tomorrow, I shall burn Thee. . . . *Dixi.*"

Father Zosima vs. The Great Inquisitor!—What an amazing contrast between the two wings of Christian thought! Which one will triumph?—The question is certainly full of burning significance, not only from the individual, but equally, from a universal or cosmic, standpoint. For, in Dostoievsky's view, the Inquisitor is the Father of Deceit, Mephisto in a Cardinal's robe, and as Shakespeare's Antonio justly remarks,

> "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

The Inquisitor has no use for Christ; he does repudiate Him, shrewdly using His sacred name as a mere sorcerer's incantation to hypnotize the devout, and make them serve his ghastly plans. Between him and his world parish—the mediæval *respublica Christiana*—there exists a sort of contractual relation, which, just as any contract, can and will be enforced by the whole paraphernalia of both laic and ecclesiastical compulsion. And who knows what this sinful Borgia is really manipulating with—a dagger in the shape of a Cross, or a Cross in the shape of a dagger?—

With all this, there is a strange likeness between the teachings of the Inquisitor and those of the Russian saint:

> ". . . No one"—says Zosima—"can judge a criminal, until he recognizes that he is as much of a criminal as the man standing before him. . . ."

And the old monk, as if prognosticating the intellectual parricide of Dmitry and his "great human suffering", bows down at his feet in the presence of the dumbfounded Karamazov family.

But the Inquisitor, too, is ready to forgive sin, so that it may seem that, in this respect at least, he faithfully abides by Christ's "Judge not, that ye be not judged". Yet his absolution of human weaknesses, like the mediæval Papal "indulgences", is being given for a "consideration"—for servile submission of men to the mundane authority of the Church. Thus, the Inquisitor's "all-forgiveness" is a bait which he holds out to lure duped mortals into his trap.

Zosima's religion is one of completeness and harmony between spirit and flesh. It is a direct negation of Pharisean hypocrisy, with its gloomy countenance and conspicuous fasting. Arid asceticism is repugnant to Zosima, and while he remembers that "man shall not live by bread alone", he does not forget that, in our Lord's prayer, we are asking for "our daily bread".

Again, on this salient point, the Inquisitor appears to be in accord with Zosima: he professes no desire to deprive his herd of their feed, and he even reproaches Christ for having rejected in the wilderness Satan's first temptation:

> "In bread"—observes the Cardinal—"there was offered Thee an invincible banner; give bread,—and man will worship thee, *for there is nothing more certain than bread."*

However, this parallelism is superficial, since the Inquisitor's "daily bread" is that food which, though it may appease the hunger of our body, must increase the thirst of our soul deprived of the blessings of its freedom.

Zosima wants men to *"be glad as children"*. And the Inquisitor?—He also dreams of making his flock cheerful as *"thousands of millions of happy babes";* he promises to fill their leisure hours with "songs and innocent dance". Is not this a perfect analogy?—Perhaps, but it is dangerously misleading, for Zosima's joy of life is happiness of the free spirit chanting its psalms to the Son of God; whereas the Inquisitor will *make* his marionettes dance around the pile of the *auto-da-fé* in the flames of which, not the vicious sinners, but the unruly rebels, are being burned and tortured to death.

Nay, *these* "ends" will never meet, and the ostensible accord between Zosima and the Inquisitor, to Dostoievsky, is only a veil behind which the tragic discord between Christ and Anti-Christ is treacherously hidden.

XVI

> "To me"—says Kirilov, one of the most dramatic figures in *The Possessed,*—"to me there is no greater idea than that there is no God."

And he draws the rectilinear conclusion that "if there is no God,—*I* am God". On this point Kirilov foreshadows Nietzsche with his proud slogan: "Man is something that has to be overcome."

The whole problem of Divine being, to Dostoievsky's hero, is pure metaphysics—a riddle as insoluble as the quadrature of the circle. His inner suffering, much as Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism, springs from one and the same source—the fixed idea of an omnipotent Will—why not say "God"?—pervading the Universe and domineering everything.

How is Kirilov going to reconcile the infinity of the Creator with the finality of the creature; the paradox of time in the face of eternity; the mystical strife of subjective freedom against the shackles of objectively real causality?—He commits suicide to "prove" that he, and no one else, is the master of his own fate, that "there is no God", and this being so, that it is within man's power to arrest the stream of ages, past and future, by precipitating the apocalyptic condition when "there will be no time", or rather, when there will be an "eternal now".

Ivan Karamazov is also a convinced challenger of the Almighty, an apostle of deadly rationalism, in whom the negation of religion has transformed itself into a religion of negation. But Ivan's struggle against the Absolute has an ulterior, or utilitarian, motive: clandestinely, he wants to get rid of Fëdor Pavlovich, his father. He is not going to commit the murder with his own hands, but he will, if not silently incite, yet tacitly approve Smerdiakov's crime, and, for this purpose, it does become necessary for Ivan to evolve a philosophy of amorality similar to that of Raskolnikov.

A brilliant dialectician, Ivan understands that, contrary to what Socrates, Kant, Mill or Adam Smith may have said,—a moral postulate is not an *autonomous* invention of the human mind, but that its nature is *heteronymous*—that the source and ultimate sanction of an ethical impulse is the Truth of Divine Providence, teaching us to distinguish between right and wrong; and that the ethical norm is a product not of logic, but of some higher and mysterious Force, which lies beyond the boundary of speculative reason. To Ivan, all this, to use Salieri's words, "is as plain as a simple gamut".

Still, if man could only discard God; if he could rest assured that there is no God,—he would then become the sole judge of his own actions, and whatever moral code he might devise for himself, he could, of his own volition, repeal it, substituting for the revoked precepts a set of new, and perhaps altogether opposite, modes of behavior.

> "Imagine"—exclaims Dostoievsky—"that there is neither God nor immortality of the soul. . . . Tell me, if I am to die quite on earth,—why should I be then living a decent life, and doing good . . . ?"

This is also the leitmotiv of Ivan's reasoning which Smerdiakov eagerly absorbs. The butler expounds his "confession of faith" *à propos* of the story of a Russian soldier who has been taken prisoner in some remote part of Asia, and was threatened with immediate execution if he did not renounce Christianity and follow Islam. He refused to deny his faith, was tortured, flayed alive and died praising Christ.

> "Well, in my opinion,"—says Smerdiakov—"if that laudable soldier's exploit was so very great, there would have been, to my thinking, no sin in it if he had, on such an emergency, renounced, so to speak, the name of Christ, and his own christening, in order by that same, to save his life for good deeds, by which, in the course of years, to expiate his cowardice. . . . For as soon as I say to those enemies, 'No, I am not a Christian, and I curse my true God,' then at once, by God's high judgment, I become immediately . . . anathema accursed, and am cut off from the Holy Church, exactly as though I were a heathen, so that, at that very instant, not only when I say it aloud, but when I think of saying it . . . I am cut off. . . . For at that very moment . . . my christening is taken off me and becomes of no avail."

Such is the quintessence of utilitarian morality, projected by man to suit man's purposes.

Unlike Kirilov, with his stormy protest against the principle itself of Divinity, Smerdiakov effaces the Image of God from his heart with the same naïveté as he exposes the "fallacy" of the Bible when grinningly he asks this question:

> "God created light on the first day, and the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day. Where did the light come from on the first day?"

A mind of this cast, with Khlestakov's ease, solves any most intricate moral rebus. In Smerdiakov, there are no glowing passions, no painfully vexing doubts. His is a "common sense" psychology, positivistic and unimaginative, like that of our friend Chichikov. Just as dispassionately as Gogol's hero is trading in "dead souls", Smerdiakov kills a live, though vile, soul. To him, as to that freshman in *Crime and Punishment,* murder comes down to arithmetic, plain and simple. Speaking to Ivan, he summarizes, in a purely business-like manner, the practical angle of the murder, which he had only recently perpetrated:

> "Why,"—says he—"after your parent's death, there was at least forty thousand to come to each of you, and very likely more. But if Fëdor Pavlovich got married, then, that lady, Agrafëna Alexándrovna, she would have had all his capital made over to her directly after the wedding, for she's plenty of sense, so that your parent would not have left you two roubles between the three of you. And were they far from a wedding either? —Not a hair's breadth: That lady had only to lift her little finger, and he would have run after her to Church, with his tongue out."

Such, in a nutshell, is Smerdiakov's whole "philosophy". To him, two by two is always four; and he has neither ideals nor dreams for the sole reason that, as he himself asserts, they are all "untrue". An eternal lackey, he apes and hates his master at the same time, and he borrows from Ivan everything that is vicious, mediocre and trivial in the Karamazov outfit.

Mephisto, Faust's demon, is illimitedly more clever than the "learned doctor" himself. But Smerdiakov, who is, or rather, becomes, Ivan's devil, is only an intrusive shadow, a contemptible half-brother, half-servant, an ugly caricature of somebody he struggles to emulate. Ivan despises him, revolts against him, but in vain. His animosity for Smerdiakov, like Gogol's revulsion to Khlestakov, is the "rage of a Caliban" perceiving in a mirror his own image.

The strangeness of Karamazov's relations with the lackey is largely the outgrowth of Ivan's own mental condition at the time when, vaguely, he starts pondering over the advantages of his father's death, and how nice it would be if the old debauchee were suddenly to depart from this world to the next. With a sinister instinct, Smerdiakov guesses the vicious dream of Ivan, and from that time on, he begins to show ever more markedly an insulting familiarity toward his elder brother:

> "Invariably Smerdiakov spoke in a tone which suggested that they two had some kind of compact, some secret between them, that had at some time been expressed on both sides, and which was

> only known to them and was beyond the comprehension of those around them."

There is something wretchedly miserable about this liaison, which grows stronger every day, notwithstanding Ivan's efforts to sever it, in this way escaping from his own morbid ghost.

This in passing: Smerdiakov could have never become the evil demon of Raskolnikov, who, at least, pretended, in his early contemplations, that the murder of the pawnbroker could be justified by considerations of benefits to mankind and the like. But no such universal schemes either are understood by, or appeal to, Smerdiakov. He is firm in his conviction that Ivan's "everything is permitted" is sheer egocentricity, a paltry longing for that bread which, according to the Inquisitor, is the most convincing factor in human intercourse.

To Smerdiakov himself, this narrow materialistic and mercenary viewpoint is something that comforts him, soothing his perverted and inverted mind. He "honestly" means, by his murder, to "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's"—for he does want Ivan to inherit the little round fortune,—appropriating, at the same time, as his own share, the cash souvenir which Fëdor Pavlovich designated, not to God, but to Grúshenka, his "darling little chick".

Now, the fact that Smerdiakov does keenly grasp the true motive of his master's "revolt against

God", cements in Ivan the feeling of disgust for his devilish *alter ego.*

XVII

WHEN Smerdiakov confessed aloud to his brother the truth about the murder of father Karamazov—a truth which our hero had surmised long before—Ivan's nervous collapse became inevitable.

First, the murder came as a shock to him; then the trial of brother Dmitry, and finally, Smerdiakov's revelations, in which he mercilessly laid bare the hideous collusion between the intellectual and physical parricides,—all this combined, broke Ivan's stubborn resistance.

> "Hallucinations"—warned the doctor—"are quite likely in your condition . . . You must take steps at once, without a moment's delay, or things will go badly with you."

But Ivan did not follow his physician's advice, and did not take to his bed.

> "I am walking about,"—he said to himself—"so I am strong enough, and if I drop, it will be different then; anyone who likes may nurse me."

This bravado failed to save him from the impending breakdown, and did not ward off the approaching phantom. While half-conscious of his delirious state, Ivan lay one evening on the sofa in his room, persistently looking at an indistinct object against the opposite wall, some one appeared to him to be sitting there, though he could not explain how the mysterious "he" could have come in, for when he returned from Smerdiakov, there had been no one in the room.

> "This was a person,"—relates Dostoievsky—"or more accurately speaking, a Russian gentleman of a particular kind, no longer young, *qui faisait la cinquantaine,* as the French say, with rather long, still thick, dark hair, slightly streaked with grey, and a small pointed beard. He was wearing a brownish reefer jacket, rather shabby, though evidently made by a good tailor, of a fashion at least three years old. . . . His linen and long scarf-like necktie were such as are worn by people who aim at being stylish, but on closer inspection, his linen was not overclean, and his white scarf was rather threadbare. The visitor's check trousers were of excellent cut, but were too light in color and too tight for the present fashion. . . . In brief, there was every appearance of gentility on straitened means . . . Such gentlemen of accommodating temper and dependent position, who can tell a story, take a hand at cards, and who have a distinct aversion for any duties that may be forced upon them, are usually solitary creatures, either bachelors or widowers."

Somewhat like Khlestakov, or even Smerdiakov, the strange visitor is a "neither here nor there" creature,—a little above the average, in one way, and a bit below the ordinary—in another; a good-natured and modest sort of fellow perhaps, but one who, like Chichikov, carefully avoids, in the exercise of modesty, overdoing anything for fear he might create the impression of being too modest; he, who though pretending to be a gentleman, in fact, is not one,—a kind of a middle-class and middle-aged chap, without too brilliant an ancestry or too famous a posterity; a person with no definitely expressed personality, such as is encountered anywhere and everywhere. He is more than a "stupid and vulgar phantom", as in his classical "dialogue" with Ivan he evinces genuinely terrestrial characteristics: he is virtually bored with everything hieroglyphic, fantastic, and not "geometrically circumscribed". Contrary to Lermontov's Soul (*The Angel*), which is afflicted with desperate anguish because

"The sounds that in Heaven have taken their
birth"

can never be replaced by

"The tedious songs of the earth",

Dostoievsky's ghost dreads the "indeterminate equations" of the World beyond; he longs to merge with the measurable and tangible, adopting all human habits.

"Please don't laugh, that's just what I like. . . .
I've grown fond of going to the public baths,—

> would you believe it? And I go and steam myself with merchants and priests. What I dream of is becoming incarnate, once for all, and irrevocably, in the body of some merchant's wife weighing eighteen stone. . . . My ideal is to go to Church and offer a candle in simple-hearted faith,—upon my word it is."

Ostensibly, then, there is nothing dreadful, nothing of a Beelzebub or a Belial, about him: like Khlestakov, he would be gladly wearing a derby and merrily walking amidst earthly crowds. And what a superb dream about that well-fed and chubby merchant's wife of the Rubens constitution, one whom the frivolous French would probably call *"une femme très utile"!*

Ivan's intruder is an everlasting emblem of all mundane things.

With savage intensity, Ivan hurls this question at the Devil: *"Is there a God or not?"*—But the deceitful ghost, the Father of Lie, sidetracks the issue by the mocking remark: "My dear fellow, upon my word, I don't know."

Dostoievsky's "gentleman" refuses to believe in the principle of polar extremities and he prefers to follow the beaten path of that middle which is the standard of the mediocre, charlatanic, banal, trivial and mean.

The germ of vulgarity which was first isolated by Poushkin, and later, scrutinized by the genius of Gogol, assumed in Dostoievsky's mind the significance of cosmic evil, all the more threatening as it penetrates our pores and fibers without our even being conscious of its presence. Those infected with its deadly toxin fall victims of the old Serpent; they become "possessed" satanists, suffering from self-asserting monomania and megalomania. Dostoievsky's heroes of this class, the Raskolnikovs, Verkhovénskys, Stavrógins, Kirilovs and Karamazovs—they all are convinced of their innate ability, *à la* Khlestakov, to "take charge of a Department", to administer their and everybody else's affairs, and they all claim the rank of intellectual "field marshals". Their delusions about themselves are at the bottom of that incurable skepsis which prompts them to rebel against the Almighty. Having lost their mental balance, every vestige of inner stability, they believe in nothing but rational certainties condensed to formulae as simple as Descartes' *"Cogito—ergo sum"*.* As to the rest—it is all equations with an *n* number of vexing *x*'s.

In Ivan's judgment, like in that of his own devil, Smerdiakov:

> "All these worlds, God, and even Satan—all this is not proved. . . ."

And they wonder if "All this exists of itself, or is only an emanation" of themselves, a logical function of their egos, which, to them, are the beginning and the end of everything that ever was or ever will be.

---

* "I think—therefore, I exist."

Dostoievsky knew that this psychic imbalance had spread, like an epidemic, all over the universe, bringing the would-be civilized world to that agony of despair through whose furnace, today, we are all being dragged.

How could this sagacious man fail to grasp the fact that, stupefied by the drug of rationalism, humanity is seeking to achieve the unachievable—to restore on earth Paradise Lost?—Rejecting religion as a symptom of mental backwardness, deliberately confusing faith with superstition,—the trained savages of modern times are tempted themselves, and seek to corrupt their credulous brethren, now by the seducing images of Sensuality, now by the stormy fancies of the Chimera, now by the inexorable silence of the Sphinx, now by the haughty promises of Reason. Everywhere armies are being convoked for "the last and decisive battle", for the resolute assault against the impregnable fortress of the Church of Christ.

We are urged to believe that there is no Spirit, no Everlasting Word, no God, and that all being, the myriads of myriads of worlds, visible and invisible, are merely manifestations of the material order, whose laws are not only accessible but even subordinate to the human mind. Like in Flaubert's great drama, where Anthony is tempted in the wilderness, *Pride, Vanity, Impiety* and *Passion,* in turn, lure us, in accord with them, to ring like a sound, to radiate like light, to penetrate every atom, to sink to the very bottom of reality, to merge with its substance, *to become matter.*

Great are the temptations of Reason, and many amongst those who hesitated have already fallen into disbelief, and many of those who did believe are beginning to hesitate.

But to Dostoievsky, there is only one thing—credulous humility—that can cure the tragic ills, moral and social, of mankind which, at present, stands helplessly at the crossroads, torn between barbarism and technocracy. In the face of all the doubts stirred up in our troubled souls, Dostoievsky, that apostle of mercy and compassion, teaches us love and all-forgiveness; he beseeches us to conserve and treasure that flaming and unshaken faith which inspired Sonia's father, Marmeládov, the toper who once was man, to conceive his touching prayer, which has caused many a tear to flow, many a heart to swell. We hear him muttering in the crowded inn words, though sounding incongruent, yet full of deepest meaning:

> ". . . Yea, there's nothing to pity me for! I ought to be crucified, crucified on a cross, not pitied! . . . At the bottom of this pint I sought tears and tribulations, and have found it, and I have tasted it. . . . But He will pity us Who has had pity on all men and all things. He is the One, He . . . is the judge. He will come on that day, and He will

> ask: 'Where is that daughter who gave herself for her cross, consumptive stepmother and for the little children of another? Where is the daughter who had pity on the filthy drunkard, her earthly father, undismayed by his beastliness?'—And He will say: 'Come to me! I have already forgiven thee once . . . Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee for thou hast loved much.' . . . And He will forgive my Sonia, He will forgive, I know it. . . . And when He has done with all of them, then He will summon us. 'You, too, come forth', He will say. 'Come forth, ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame!' And we shall all come forth without shame and shall stand before Him. And He will say unto us: 'Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and in his mark; but come ye also!' And the wise ones . . . will say, 'Oh Lord, why dost Thou receive these men?' And He will say, 'This is why I receive them, oh, ye wise, this is why I receive them, oh ye of understanding, that not one of them believed himself to be worthy of this.' And He will hold out His hands to us, and we shall fall down before Him . . . and we shall understand all things. . . . Lord, Thy Kingdom come!"

In the narrowness of the human dust, in the humble murmurs of a worshipping heart, in the subdued sighs and obscure tears of silent grief, the mighty Russian has perceived a greater work of God than that which He has done "in lifting the rocks of granite higher than the clouds of heaven, and veiling them with their various mantle of purple flower and shadowy pine." And he knew that this purifying humility of the spirit can be possessed not only by the ignorant and the weak, but also by the enlightened and the strong—not only by the Marmeládovs, but also by men of extraordinary mental power, like Pasteur, perhaps the greatest scientist of the lapsed Century, who confessed to the "immortals" of the French Academy:

> "I have studied much, and therefore, I believe like a Brittany peasant. Were I to become more learned, my faith would grow as profound and fervent as that of a Brittany peasant woman."

Dostoievsky died when he had reached the zenith of his fame—only one year after he had completed *Brothers Karamazov,* and only a few months after his Poushkin speech in Moscow, which shook all Russia with elemental enthusiasm, leaving in the wake of his otherwise gloomy literary career, a streak of scintillating, almost blinding, light.

In January, 1881, he was stricken by an attack of emphysema, which became aggravated by rupture of the lung artery. Rózanov relates that at all critical moments of his life, Dostoievsky was in the habit of opening at random that copy of the Gospels which he had with him in Siberia, and then he would read the first few words on the open page. So he also did on the day of his death when he felt the crisis nearing. The first two verses happened to be from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

> "But John forbad him, saying I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
>
> And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

When his wife read him these lines, he told her:

> "Do you hear?—*Suffer it to be so now;* this means that I will die."

He did die that same evening.

Enormous crowds attended his funeral: men and women from all walks of life—statesmen of high rank and downtrodden prostitutes; illiterate peasants and distinguished literators; army officers and learned scientists; credulous priests and incredulous students—They were all there.

Whom did Russia bury with so great a reverence?—Was it only one of her famous artists or talented writers?—Indeed not: in that coffin lay a noble and lofty *man,* a prudent teacher, an inspired prophet, whose thoughts, like mountain peaks, were always pointed toward heaven, and who had measured the depths of the quivering heart with all its struggles and tempests; its riddles, pains and sorrows, its doleful tears and burning passions. For he did teach men to live and love and suffer; and to the meekest he would extend his helping hand; he would offer his brotherly compassion to all who labor and are heavy laden. He would come to them as an equal, laying before them the wisdom of his soul, his tender understanding of all that, in modern man, is human and even inhuman. He would counsel the doubting and soothe the wounds of those afflicted with distress. And many a hope would be restored, many a soul resurrected by the grand visions and magic of his genius.

Now he was no longer. The cold blast of Death extinguished a luminous torch of Truth.

The news of Dostoievsky's passing, instantly, like an electric current, spread to the remotest parts of Russia, and a wave of mourning swept through the hearts of her saddened people, and millions were humbly praying that he, to whom happiness was so cruelly denied on earth, be granted eternal peace in the smiling Garden of Heaven.

Princeton Theological Seminary Library
1 1012 01561 5406

06-17 STD

8 032919 991409

www.colibrisystem.com